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Economics and the 'Patriot' Movement

Economic Downturn Could Bring War Between Haves and Have-Nots

Crime in the United States has fallen for seven consecutive years, according to the preliminary figures recently released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The seven-percent drop in both property crimes and violent crimes constitute the largest decrease in crime since the decline began in 1992. Some criminologists attribute the positive trend to the robust economy, which has provided work for unskilled young people who were formerly shut out of the job market. Recent reports from Wall Street, however, warn that the economic boom of the 1990s cannot—and will not—continue forever, and security experts worry that a major recession could trigger a tidal wave of crime.

One segment of the American population that could take advantage of such an opportunity is the so-called "patriot" movement, an ideology subscribed to by such fanatics as Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols—the perpetrators of the Oklahoma City bombing. Found primarily in rural areas, the movement appeals to those who have not shared in the nation's prosperity: farmers and ranchers who have suffered great losses as society embraces globalization and corporatization. As the gap between the haves and the have-nots continues to widen, these disenfranchised citizens may well strike at the government they hold responsible for their misfortunes.

Since September 1979, The Lipman Report has provided extensive coverage of the terrorist threat both abroad and at home, long before the destruction of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building brought the issue of domestic terrorism to the forefront of national security. This edition examines the domestic threat of today and offers recommendations to protect businesses from potential attacks.

The 'Patriot' Movement

The militia or "patriot" movement rose in the 1990s in response to a perception among the radical right that the federal government seeks to usurp the Constitutional rights of American citizens, particularly the right to bear arms. Based on an ultranationalistic, selective populism, the movement claims it is seeking to restore America to the days of its founding fathers, generally by the exclusion of many citizens in today's diverse America. A core tenet held by adherents to this ideology is that a reactionary revolution will pro-

duce a national renaissance, ending the world conspiracy that has yielded decades of social and political corruption. These individuals rally around events such as the Weaver standoff at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and the burning of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, pointing to these incidents as prime examples of government oppression.

The leaders of the movement promote a paranoid view of the world that separates followers from society as a whole. One common myth claims that the U.S. government uses black military helicopters to "round up" dissidents and transport them to detention camps. Another links the United Nations with a plot called the "New World Order," which seeks to establish global dominion and enslave mankind. Such theories represent some of the more extreme views of the movement, but other basic tenets receive much wider acceptance within the general population, opening the doors for extremists. "Their initial pitch is attractive to a lot of people," said a former FBI official. "They say that government is too big, that taxes are too high, and that the bigger government gets, the more rights it tries to take away from us. Those are things that people listen to."

Underlying much of the rhetoric is the desire for unrestricted freedom to own and purchase firearms and weaponry. These believers consider themselves the nation's last defense against a government that seeks to bind its citizens, a belief that has contributed to the recent upswing in militia activities during the last decade. The fact that the "patriot" agenda shares many views with white supremacists creates a highly volatile situation, especially given the latter's proclivity toward violence. Many of the militia movement's leaders belong to the Christian Identity religion, which believes that whites are the true "chosen people of Israel." Identity happens to be the preferred religion for Neo-Nazi hate groups, noted for their vicious racism and anti-Semitism.

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An Active Movement

In the four years following the Oklahoma City bombing, the FBI has witnessed a significant increase in domestic terrorist activity. Indeed, the federal agency is currently investigating more than 1,000 domestic-terrorism cases, compared to only 100 open cases before the April 1995 tragedy. Law enforcement officials warn that much of the increased activity stems from heightened awareness of the problem. In many of the 39 domestic-terrorism cases documented since Oklahoma City, authorities arrested would-be conspirators before they could execute their plans. Yet, those same cases also revealed an important shift in domestic terrorism. Prior to the 1995 bombing, most incidents of domestic terror stemmed from a handful of causes with widely varying political agendas: anti-abortion and animal-rights activists, pro-environmental radicals and racist “hate” groups. Authorities have now seen a surge in the number of incidents originating within the “patriot” movement.

Even so, relatively few of these cases involve acts of mass destruction. The majority of these protesters operate on a much smaller scale, waging their war through acts such as pipe bombings, armed standoffs, bank robberies, attacks on abortion clinics and hate crimes. Many others fight their economic battles through paper terrorism, issuing invalid “warrants” as payment and placing bogus liens against the property of their perceived enemies. While not deadly, these two forms of attack nonetheless exact a high toll in terms of inconvenience and wasted resources in fighting these false documents, particularly in the latter case.

The use of bogus liens originated among right-wing radicals during the late 1970s and early 1980s, as stricken farmers sought to stall the foreclosure of their land. The resurgence of the “patriot” movement in the 1990s, however, revived the popularity of this tactic when movement members

recognized the liens as an inexpensive, yet effective way to intimidate public officials and to wreak revenge against their enemies. Compared to the nominal filing fee to originate the lien, victims must pay hefty attorneys’ fees to dissolve the liens. In the meantime, the liens clog the judicial system, tie up the transfer of real estate and other property, and delay action against the “patriot.” Between 1994 and 1997, the number of bogus liens placed by right-wing extremists reached well into the thousands, with individual liens demanding hundreds of thousands of dollars.

On the other hand, some individuals prefer to settle their grievances through violent means. Last October, for example, authorities in North Carolina arrested a former Ku Klux Klan member for bringing a fake bomb to a county commission meeting and threatening the commissioners with car bombs. The accused, a former demolitions engineer, had been waging an extended battle over zoning disputes and had threatened to demolish buildings using several tons of ammonium nitrate stockpiled at his farm.

The Haves and the Have-Nots

Today, as in the past, many economic forces continue to drive the movement, which has grown to include 435 active groups as of 1998. As a result, these radical individuals could find additional support among the have-nots in society, many of whom accuse the haves of enrichment at their expense. Should the economy plunge, these disenfranchised members of society may elect to cast their lot with this demonstrative sector.

For example, much of the militia activity takes place in the Western region of the country in reaction to government acts that they believe hinder the agricultural community. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), in particular, has become a prime target for restricting access to grazing land. Approximately 100 counties throughout the West have joined the growing County Rule movement, unilaterally claim-

ing jurisdiction over federal lands and threatening to arrest federal agents who interfere with local farmers' and ranchers' use of the lands in question. The National Forest Service (NFS) has also incurred the wrath of these groups for its practice of leasing lands to timber companies for logging. In keeping with militia doctrine, these individuals want no federal limits on their activities at all, and they have peppered both BLM and NFS facilities with bombs throughout the West, including Nevada, New Mexico and Utah.

Other economic concerns affect movement members across the nation. The "patriot" community holds that, in addition to the United Nations, the people behind the "New World Order" are the "international bankers" and the ultra-rich.

Adherents are convinced that the Kennedy and Rockefeller families maintain their wealth through obscure, but legal methods of avoiding taxes and regulations. Those with anti-Semitic views believe that the Jews control the world's financial systems. In both cases, movement members have a deep-seated distrust of banks and federal institutions and agencies. Consequently, many of these individuals react against this system by refusing to pay income taxes and eschewing the services of banks and other financial institutions. Some, in fact, take their ideology so far as to issue invalid checks, written against a non-existent bank.

Still others within the movement publicly denounce such evils as "internationalism" and "capitalism." Members of the "patriot" community host web sites as arenas to discuss the unscrupulous practices of "bloated corporations." Such sites offer legitimate venues for people to exercise their privilege of free speech and are innocuous in their own right. The danger, however, occurs when a handful of individuals decides to take more aggressive action, a strategy known as "leaderless resistance." McVeigh and Nichols were two such individuals. So was Michael Dorsett, who received a prison sentence last October for his role in plotting a 1997 attack on Fort Hood, Texas, during an

Independence Day celebration with more than 50,000 participants. Not all movement members are content to voice their opinion within the boundaries of the law.

Protecting U.S. Businesses

While the "patriot" community tends to thrive in more rural communities, businesses in metropolitan areas cannot entirely discount their threat. Certainly, any government agency or organization with government ties is a potential target, but so are companies that may unknowingly violate the radical beliefs of movement members. For this reason, organizations need to become aware of any "patriot" activity in the local area and take appropriate action to protect against possible retaliation.

In many cases, protection from extremist groups simply involves sound security practices. The following guidelines can help prevent an attack:

- *Establish an employee awareness program.* Companies need to educate their employees on the potential threat of the "patriot" community through seminars and published bulletins. The program needs to establish open lines of communication so that employees feel comfortable reporting concerns and potential problems to management. Informed personnel can prove invaluable in thwarting an attack.
- *Learn about local militia activity.* Often, such groups merely share anti-government views but rarely act. Still, companies need to be aware of their presence, while monitoring dates and events that might incite a fringe member to make a violent statement. Such was the case with McVeigh, who plotted the Oklahoma City bombing to coincide with the one-year anniversary of the conflagration in Waco.
- *Form partnerships with law enforcement.* Federal authorities have partnered with local law enforcement organizations across the coun-

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try to monitor potential domestic terrorist activity. Companies can report suspicious activity to local authorities, which leverage the advantage of immediate surveillance against the broader intelligence capabilities of federal agencies.

- *Form alliances with other security directors.* Sharing information with peers in the security industry can raise awareness of potential threats, while offering opportunities to learn new ways to protect one's organization. Uniting against common threats can increase the likelihood of thwarting an attack before execution.
- *Perform careful background checks.* Thorough personnel screening can protect organizations from individuals who might attempt to sabotage operations for political motives. At a minimum, this process should include verification of a candidate's legal work status; work history; educational institutions and degrees earned; professional accreditation; driving and criminal records; credit history; and where applicable, military discharge status.
- *Become involved in the local community.* Active involvement within the community will enable an organization to understand the views and concerns of the citizens, which reflect the concerns of their employees. Such insight can alert a company to sensitive issues that require special consideration.
- *Evaluate facility access control.* Organizations need to determine their access control needs based on their culture and the relative risk of attack. Government agencies in areas with high militia activity, for instance, may consider using concrete barriers to strengthen perimeter control.
- *Set up an employee hot line.* Companies at high risk of attack need to consider establishing a toll-free number to provide employees the opportunity to discuss areas of concern or to disclose overheard threats while maintain-

ing anonymity. Organizations should then investigate the information given.

- *Use professional security services.* By placing the responsibility for physical security—both technology and uniformed personnel—in the hands of professionals, companies free their human resources to focus on personnel-related issues: employee assistance programs, employee interaction, discipline and employment.
- *Lobby for protective federal legislation.* Tougher security measures to prevent violent attacks may incite "patriots" to seek retribution through paper warfare, using bogus liens. No federal legislation exists to protect organizations and individuals from such devices, leaving citizens and corporations to rely on a patchwork of state legislation for protection.

The farm crisis of the 1970s and 1980s initiated an upswing in right-wing extremism as many hard-working Americans fought to preserve their way of life from a federal government that they felt had grown too big to care for its citizens. With the events in Ruby Ridge, Waco and Oklahoma City fueling the radical right, the growing "patriot" movement could experience yet another resurgence when the nation's booming economy begins its correction.

American corporations cannot wait until that time to protect their employees and their assets; they must learn about these organizations now before the damage has been done. By gaining an understanding of these radical elements, Corporate America can work with local and federal authorities to settle confrontations without violence or other terrorist actions. Ignoring the issue will only set the stage for the next Oklahoma City.



The Lipman Report Editors