

# The Second Wave: Return of the Militias

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In this report, SPLC investigates the resurgence of the antigovernment militia movement across the country, which has been fueled by fears of a black man in the White House, the changing demographics of the country, and conspiracy theories increasingly spread by mainstream figures.

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## Introduction

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The 1990s saw the rise and fall of the virulently antigovernment “Patriot” movement, made up of paramilitary militias, tax defiers and so-called “sovereign citizens.” Sparked by a combination of anger at the federal government and the deaths of political dissenters at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and Waco, Texas, the movement took off in the middle of the decade and continued to grow even after 168 people were left dead by the 1995 bombing of Oklahoma City’s federal building — an attack, the deadliest ever by domestic U.S. terrorists, carried out by men steeped in the rhetoric and conspiracy

theories of the militias. In the years that followed, a truly remarkable number of criminal plots came out of the movement. But by early this century, the Patriots had largely faded, weakened by systematic prosecutions, aversion to growing violence, and a new, highly conservative president.

They're back. Almost a decade after largely disappearing from public view, right-wing militias, ideologically driven tax defiers and sovereign citizens are appearing in large numbers around the country. "Paper terrorism" — the use of property liens and citizens' "courts" to harass enemies — is on the rise. And once-popular militia conspiracy theories are making the rounds again, this time accompanied by nativist theories about secret Mexican plans to "reconquer" the American Southwest. One law enforcement agency has found 50 new militia training groups — one of them made up of present and former police officers and soldiers. Authorities around the country are reporting a worrying uptick in Patriot activities and propaganda. "This is the most significant growth we've seen in 10 to 12 years," says one. "All it's lacking is a spark. I think it's only a matter of time before you see threats and violence."

A key difference this time is that the federal government — the entity that almost the entire radical right views as its primary enemy — is headed by a black man. That, coupled with high levels of non-white immigration and a decline in the percentage of whites overall in America, has helped to racialize the Patriot movement, which in the past was not primarily motivated by race hate. One result has been a remarkable rash of domestic terror incidents since the presidential campaign, most of them related to anger over the election of Barack Obama. At the same time, ostensibly mainstream politicians and media pundits have helped to spread Patriot and related propaganda, from conspiracy theories about a secret network of U.S. concentration camps to wholly unsubstantiated claims about the president's country of birth.

Fifteen years ago, the Southern Poverty Law Center wrote then-Attorney General Janet Reno to warn about extremists in the militia movement, saying that the "mixture of armed groups and those who hate" was "a recipe for disaster." Just six months later, Oklahoma City's federal building was bombed. Today, the Patriot movement may not have the white-hot fury that it did in the 1990s. But the movement clearly is growing again, and Americans, in particular law enforcement officers, need to take the dangers it presents seriously. That is equally true for the politicians, pundits and preachers who, through pandering or ignorance, abet the growth of a movement marked by a proven predilection for violence.

## The Second Wave

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*By Larry Keller*

In Pensacola, Fla., retired FBI agent Ted Gunderson tells a gathering of antigovernment “Patriots” that the federal government has set up 1,000 internment camps across the country and is storing 30,000 guillotines and a half-million caskets in Atlanta. They’re there for the day the government finally declares martial law and moves in to round up or kill American dissenters, he says. “They’re going to keep track of all of us, folks,” Gunderson warns.

Outside Atlanta, a so-called “American Grand Jury” issues an “indictment” of Barack Obama for fraud and treason because, the panel concludes, he wasn’t born in the United States and is illegally occupying the office of president. Other sham “grand juries” around the country follow suit.

And on the site in Lexington, Mass., where the opening shots of the Revolutionary War were fired in 1775, members of Oath Keepers, a newly formed group of law enforcement officers, military men and veterans, “muster” on April 19 to reaffirm their pledge to defend the U.S. Constitution. “We’re in perilous times ... perhaps far more perilous than in 1775,” says the man administering the oath. April 19 is the anniversary not only of the battle of Lexington Green, but also of the 1993 conflagration at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, and the lethal bombing two years later of the Oklahoma City federal building — seminal events in the lore of the extreme right, in particular the antigovernment Patriot movement.

Almost 10 years after it seemed to disappear from American life, there are unmistakable signs of a revival of what in the 1990s was commonly called the militia movement. From Idaho to New Jersey and Michigan to Florida, men in khaki and camouflage are back in the woods, gathering to practice the paramilitary skills they believe will be needed to fend off the socialistic troops of the “New World Order.”

One big difference from the militia movement of the 1990s is that the face of the federal government — the enemy that almost all parts of the extreme right see as the primary threat to freedom — is now black. And the fact that the president is an African American has injected a strong racial element into even those parts of the radical right, like the militias, that in the past were not primarily motivated by race hate. Contributing to the racial animus have been fears on the far right about the consequences of Latino immigration.

Militia rhetoric is being heard widely once more, often from a second generation of ideologues, and conspiracy theories are being energetically revived or invented anew. “Paper terrorism” — the use of property liens, bogus legal documents and “citizens’ grand juries” to attack enemies and, sometimes, reap illegal fortunes — is again proliferating, to the point where the government has set up special efforts to rein in so-called “tax defiers” and to track threats against judges. What’s more, Patriot fears about the government are being amplified by a loud new group of ostensibly mainstream media commentators and politicians.

It’s not 1996 all over again, or 1997 or 1998. Although there has been a remarkable rash of domestic terrorist incidents since Obama’s election in November, it has not reached the level of criminal violence, attempted terrorist attacks and white-hot language that marked the militia movement at its peak. But militia training events, huge numbers of which are now viewable on YouTube videos, are spreading. One federal agency estimates that 50 new militia training groups have sprung up in less than two years. Sales of guns and ammunition have skyrocketed amid fears of new gun control laws, much as they did in the 1990s.

The situation has many authorities worried. Militiamen, white supremacists, anti-Semites, nativists, tax protesters and a range of other activists of the radical right are cross-pollinating and may even be coalescing. In the words of a February report from law enforcement officials in Missouri, a variety of factors have combined recently to create “a lush environment for militia activity.”

“You’re seeing the bubbling [of antigovernment sentiment] right now,” says Bart McEntire, who has infiltrated racist hate groups and now is the supervisory special agent for the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in Roanoke, Va. “You see people buying into what they’re saying. It’s primed to grow. The only thing you don’t have to set it on fire is a Waco or Ruby Ridge.”

Another federal law enforcement official knowledgeable about militia groups agrees. He asked not to be identified because he is not authorized to speak publicly about them. “They’re not at the level we saw in ’94-’95,” he says. “But this is the most significant growth we’ve seen in 10 to 12 years. All it’s lacking is a spark. I think it’s only a matter of time before you see threats and violence.”

### Shots, Plots and ‘Sovereigns’

In fact, threats and violence from the radical right already are accelerating (see last section of this report, a list of 75 domestic terrorist plots and rampages since 1995). In

recent months, men with antigovernment, racist, anti-Semitic or pro-militia views have allegedly committed a series of high-profile murders — including the killings of six law enforcement officers since April.

Most of these recent murders and plots seem to have been at least partially prompted by Obama's election. One man "very upset" with the election of America's first black president was building a radioactive "dirty bomb"; another, a Marine, was planning to assassinate Obama, as were two racist skinheads in Tennessee; still another angry at the election and said to be interested in joining a militia killed two sheriff's deputies in Florida. A man in Pittsburgh who feared Jews and gun confiscations murdered three police officers. Near Boston, a white man angered by the alleged "genocide" of his race shot to death two African immigrants and intended to murder as many Jews as possible. An 88-year-old neo-Nazi killed a guard at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. And an abortion physician in Kansas was murdered by a man steeped in the ideology of the "sovereign citizens" movement.

So-called sovereign citizens are people who subscribe to an ideology, originated by the anti-Semitic Posse Comitatus of the 1980s, that claims that whites are a higher kind of citizen — subject only to "common law," not the dictates of the government — while blacks are mere "14th Amendment citizens" who must obey their government masters. Although not all sovereigns subscribe to or even know about the theory's racist basis, most contend that they do not have to pay taxes, are not subject to most laws, and are not citizens of the United States.

Authorities and anecdotal evidence suggest that sovereign citizens — who, along with tax protesters and militia members, form the larger Patriot movement — may make up the most dramatically reenergized sector of the radical right. In February, the FBI launched a national operation targeting white supremacists and "militia/sovereign citizen extremist groups" after noting an upsurge in such organizations, The Wall Street Journal reported. The aim is to gather intelligence about "this emerging threat," according to an FBI memo cited by the newspaper.

Increasingly, sovereign citizens are claiming they aren't subject to income taxes — so much so that the Department of Justice last year kicked off a National Tax Defier Initiative to deal with the volume of cases. At the same time, more and more seem to be engaging in "paper terrorism," even though more than 30 states passed or strengthened laws outlawing the filing of unjustified property liens and simulating legal process (by setting up pseudo-legal "common law courts" and "citizens' grand juries") in response to sovereign activity in the 1990s.

A Michigan man whose company allegedly doubled as the headquarters of a militia group, for example, was arrested in May on charges that he placed bogus liens on property owned by courthouse officials and police officers to harass them and ruin their credit. In March, authorities raided a Las Vegas printing firm where meetings of the “Sovereign People’s Court for the United States” were conducted in a mock courtroom. Seminars allegedly were taught there on how to use phony documents and other illegal means to pay off creditors. Four people were arrested on money-laundering, tax and weapons charges.

Due to a spike in “inappropriate communications,” including many from sovereign citizens, the U.S. Marshals Service has opened a clearinghouse in suburban Washington, D.C., for assessing risks to court personnel. The incidents include telephone and written threats against federal judges and prosecutors, as well as bomb threats and biochemical incidents. In fiscal 2008, there were 1,278 threats and harassing communications — more than double the number of six years earlier. The number of such incidents is on pace to increase again in fiscal 2009. Sovereign citizens account for a small percentage of the cases, but theirs are more complex and generally require more resources, says Michael Prout, assistant director of judicial security for the marshals. “They are resourceful groups,” he adds.

Some sovereign citizen attempts to skirt the law have been farcical. An Arkansas jury needed only seven minutes in April to convict Richard Bauer, 70, of robbing a bank. Bauer had argued that the government took his money several times, leaving him with almost nothing. “I’m a constitutionalist,” he insisted, adding that “every single act was justifiable.” A month earlier, a Pennsylvania man charged with drunken driving told court officials that they lacked jurisdiction over him because he was a “sovereign man.” Then he changed his mind and pleaded guilty. In Nevada, a sovereign citizen — perhaps a Dr. Seuss fan — used the peculiar punctuation of names that is favored by the movement; his name, he declared, was “I am: Sam.”

But few of the cases are that amusing. In February, a New York man who once declared himself a “sovereign citizen” of the “Republic of New York” and said that he enjoyed studying “the organic Constitution and the Bill of Rights” allegedly shot and killed four people. His murder case was pending at press time.

### Swearing at the Government

Oath Keepers, the military and police organization that was formed earlier this year and held its April muster on Lexington Green, may be a particularly worrisome example of the Patriot revival. Members vow to fulfill the oaths to the Constitution that they swore

while in the military or law enforcement. “Our oath is to the Constitution, not to the politicians, and we will not obey unconstitutional (and thus illegal) and immoral orders,” the group says. Oath Keepers lists 10 orders its members won’t obey, including two that reference U.S. concentration camps.

That same pugnacious attitude was on display after conservatives attacked an April report from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that suggested a resurgence of radical right-wing activity was under way. “We will not fear our government; they will fear us,” one man, who appeared to be on active duty in the Army, said in an angry video sent to the Oath Keepers blog. In another video at the site, a man who said he was a former Army paratrooper in Afghanistan and Iraq described President Obama as “an enemy of the state,” adding, “I would rather die than be a slave to my government.” The Oath Keepers site soon began hawking T-shirts with slogans like “I’m a Right Wing Extremist and Damn Proud of It!”

In April, Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes — a Yale Law School graduate and former aide to U.S. Rep. Ron Paul (a Texas Republican and hard-line libertarian) — worried about a coming dictatorship. “We know that if the day should come where a full-blown dictatorship would come, or tyranny ... it can only happen if those men, our brothers in arms, go along and comply with unconstitutional, unlawful orders,” Rhodes told conspiracy-minded radio host Alex Jones. “Imagine if we focus on the police and military. Game over for the New World Order.”

He’s not the first to think so. In the 1990s, retired Phoenix cop and conspiracy enthusiast Jack McLamb created an outfit called Police Against the New World Order and produced a 75-page document entitled Operation Vampire Killer 2000: American Police Action Plan for Stopping World Government Rule.

It’s not known how large Oath Keepers is. But there is some evidence beyond the group’s mere existence to suggest that today’s Patriots are again making inroads into law enforcement — the leak of the DHS report, along with those of a couple of similar law enforcement reports, was likely the work of a sworn officer. Rhodes claims to know a federal officer leaked the DHS report, and says Oath Keepers is “hearing from more and more federal officers all the time.”

The group does seem to be on the radar of federal law enforcement officers. In May, a member complained on the group’s website of a visit to his farm by FBI agents who asked him, he said, about training he provides in firearms, survival skills and the like.

One Oath Keeper is longtime militia hero Richard Mack, a former sheriff of a rural Arizona county who collaborated with white supremacist Randy Weaver on a book and who, along with others, won a U.S. Supreme Court decision that weakened the Brady Bill gun control law in the 1990s. “The greatest threat we face today is not terrorists; it is our federal government,” Mack says on his website. “One of the best and easiest solutions is to depend on local officials, especially the sheriff, to stand against federal intervention and federal criminality.” Mack’s views echo those of the Posse Comitatus, which believed that sheriffs are the highest law enforcement authorities in America. “I pray for the day that a sheriff in this country will arrest an IRS agent for trespassing or attempting to victimize citizens in that particular sheriff’s county,” Mack said in a video he made for Oath Keepers.

Why the Return?

Why are militias and the larger Patriot movement making a comeback?

The original militia movement took off in the mid-1990s, with the first large militias appearing in 1994 and growth continuing over the next several years. The movement reflected widespread anger over what was seen as the meddling of a relatively liberal administration in Washington — from gun control to environmental laws to a variety of other federal mandates. But what really ignited the movement was the bloodshed in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and Waco, Texas. In 1992, during a standoff between white supremacist Randy Weaver’s family in Idaho and federal agents — a confrontation that began with Weaver’s sale of an illegal weapon — Weaver’s son and wife were killed, along with a U.S. marshal. The following year, some 80 members of the gun-loving Branch Davidian cult died in a fire that ended a 52-day standoff with federal agents in Texas. Thousands of Americans saw these events as proof that the federal government was prepared to murder its own citizens in order to enforce a kind of liberal orthodoxy — a so-called “New World Order” (NWO) that reflected the economic and political globalization that militia backers felt was robbing their country of its independence and unique culture.

The movement was animated by a welter of conspiracy theories, the bulk of them decrying NWO plots that were said to be aimed at imposing socialism on the United States, sending patriotic Americans to prison camps, destroying farmers with secret weather machines, and so on. Most militia enthusiasts also blamed the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing on the government — it was a “false flag” operation carried out by the Clinton Administration, they contended, and designed to soften up the American public to accept draconian anti-terrorism legislation.

But the movement of the '90s ultimately wound down, almost petering out after the turn of the millennium. That was for a variety of reasons, including the arrests of many militia backers in terrorist plots, the jailing of hundreds of others on weapons violations, and the violence the movement continued to produce even after 168 people, including 19 children, were murdered in Oklahoma City by men steeped in the ideology of both militias and racist hate groups. The failure of any of the many dire Patriot predictions or conspiracy theories to come true also hurt the movement, as did the 2000 election of a conservative president, which had the effect of defusing militia backers' anger. Apocalyptic warnings from militia leaders about an expected "Y2K" collapse on Jan. 1, 2000, also turned out to be entirely without merit, becoming a kind of final nail in the coffin of the movement.

Now, it seems, they are back. Every month, there are militia trainings announced around the country — and untold numbers that are not publicized. The Internet teems with training videos, information about meetings and rallies, far-fetched rumors and conspiracy theories. Joining 1990s militia stalwarts like Gunderson and Mack is a new generation of activists, as exemplified in the case of Edward Koernke. Koernke's father, Mark Koernke, was a prominent '90s militia propagandist known as "Mark from Michigan." The elder Koernke served nearly six years in prison on charges that included assaulting police. Today, his son hosts an Internet radio show devoted to all things militia.

The current resurgence has several apparent causes. In the largest sense, it is again a response to real societal stresses and strains, from the seemingly inevitable rise of multiculturalism to the faltering economy to another liberal administration, this one headed by a black man. Similar factors have driven the number of race-based hate groups, as distinct from Patriot groups, from 602 in 2000 to 926 in 2008, according to research by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

"This frequently happens when elections favor the political left and the society is seen as moving toward greater social equality or away from traditional societal hierarchies," Chip Berlet, a long-time analyst of the radical right at Political Research Associates, said in a June newsletter. "In this scenario, it is easier for right-wing demagogues to successfully demonize liberals," immigrants and others.

In fact, the anti-immigration movement is both fueling and helping to racialize the antigovernment Patriot resurgence. More and more, members of nativist groups like the Minutemen are adopting core militia ideas and fears (see next section of this report). And they have contributed their own conspiracy theories — about the secret Mexican

“Plan de Aztlan” to reconquer the American Southwest, and another involving the secretly arranged merger of the United States, Mexico and Canada into a “North American Union” — to the long list of nefarious plots already identified by the Patriot movement.

Far-right fears of conspiracies have come from other quarters, as well, most notably from the so-called “birthers” who have filed a series of lawsuits making the claim that Obama is not a U.S. citizen. These spurious claims first gained traction when prominent extremists like writer Jerome Corsi, politician Alan Keyes and Watergate felon and radio show host G. Gordon Liddy questioned the validity of the president’s birth certificate. Many Patriots have also adopted conspiracy theories about secret government involvement in events like the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the crash of TWA Flight 800 in 1996.

“The current political environment is awash with seemingly absurd but nonetheless influential conspiracy theories, hyperbolic claims and demonized targets,” Berlet concluded. “And this creates a milieu where violence is a likely outcome.”

### Going Mainstream

A remarkable aspect of the current antigovernment movement is the extent to which it has gained support from elected officials and mainstream media outlets. Lawmakers complaining about the intrusiveness of the federal government have introduced 10th Amendment resolutions (reasserting that those powers not granted to the federal government remain with the states) in about three dozen states. In Texas, Gov. Rick Perry raised the prospect of secession several months after Obama’s inauguration — a notion first brought up there in the ’90s by the militia-like Republic of Texas. U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn.) said she feared that the president was planning “reeducation camps for young people,” while U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-Ala.), evoking memories of the discredited communist-hunter Sen. Joseph McCarthy, warned of 17 “socialists” in Congress. Fox News host Glenn Beck, who has called Obama a fascist, a Nazi and a Marxist, even re-floated militia conspiracy theories of the 1990s alleging a secret network of government-run concentration camps.

The original movement also had its mainstream backers, but they were largely confined to talk radio; today, Beck is just one of the well-known cable TV news personalities to air fictitious conspiracies and other unlikely Patriot ideas. CNN’s Lou Dobbs has treated the so-called Aztlan conspiracy as a bona fide concern and questioned the validity of Obama’s birth certificate despite his own network’s definitive debunking of that claim. On MSNBC, commentator Pat Buchanan suggested recently that white Americans are now

suffering “exactly what was done to black folks.” On FOX News, regular contributor Dick Morris said, “Those crazies in Montana who say, ‘We’re going to kill ATF agents because the U.N.’s going to take over’ — well, they’re beginning to have a case.”

At the same time, players like the National Rifle Association, which in the 1990s publicly attacked federal law enforcement agents as “jackbooted thugs,” are back at it. Two months before the election last fall, firearms manufacturers joined forces to promote NRA membership in a national campaign ominously dubbed “Prepare for the Storm in 2008.”

Gun shows, too, are back as major venues for militia-like ideology. In a video produced in April by Max Blumenthal, senior writer at the online news site The Daily Beast, one man interviewed at a show said, “If Obama tries to get rid of our guns, it’s just a step away from trying to take away everything else.” Another said show attendees were “preparing for the worst.”

Patriot ideology also has crept into the anti-tax “tea parties” that were staged by conservatives around the country in April and July. In addition to protesting government spending and taxation, some demonstrators called for the sovereignty of the states, abolition of the Federal Reserve (a long-time bogeyman of the radical right), and an end to “socialism” in Washington. At the Jacksonville, Fla., July tea party, some protesters carried signs that compared President Obama to Adolf Hitler.

Once again, fearful Patriots are scurrying to prepare for what they see as the coming societal meltdown, stockpiling not only weaponry but food and an array of other items. Newsletter publisher Lee Bellinger, for instance, peddles *Social Chaos Survival Guide: Smart, Savvy Precautions to Make You Self-Reliant in These Dangerous Times* and warns of “impending national social chaos.” The book, he says, is “for people who want to stand their ground without attracting a whole lot of attention — either from the authorities” or “mobs of desperate fellow citizens.”

The recent Department of Homeland Security report also pointed to the role of the Internet in the current movement: “Unlike the earlier period, the advent of the Internet and other information-age technologies since the 1990s has given domestic extremists greater access to information related to bomb-making, weapons training and tactics, as well as targeting of individuals, organizations and facilities, potentially making ... the consequences of their violence more severe.”

Whither the Militia Movement?

Evidence that angry Americans are arming themselves for action is growing. In March, for instance, a Spokane, Wash., man pleaded guilty to illegally possessing two grenade launchers, 54 grenades, 37 machine guns, eight silencers and a variety of explosives in a storage unit. The man had an “End the Fed” bumper sticker on his vehicle. In May, another Washington resident was charged with keeping an illegal cache of weapons that included a machine gun, four silencers, and two guns made by a local gunsmith and inscribed with “Christian warrior” and “NObama.”

In Nebraska, a jury convicted Allison Klanecky for possession of unregistered grenade components. Prosecutors said that a search of Klanecky’s barn and an underground bunker turned up dozens of containers of explosive powder, fuses and other components that could be used to make up to 93 grenades, plus an unregistered 12-gauge military shotgun called a “Streetsweeper.” Klanecky was involved in an end-times group called The Prophecy Club that sells conspiracy books and DVDs on everything from the New World Order to globalism and the 9/11 attacks.

A good illustration of antigovernment Patriot movement paranoia was the reaction to a National Guard exercise planned for April in the little town of Arcadia, Iowa. The guardsmen had intended to conduct a four-day mock search for an arms dealer that would include patrolling the town’s streets, distributing photos of the fictional bad guy and knocking on doors of residents who agreed to participate in the drill.

Alex Jones, the radio host and conspiracy theorist, got wind of the plans and interviewed a National Guard official, setting off an avalanche of angry calls and visits to his website from people who feared the exercise was really about imposing a dictatorship or martial law on the country. “Tell them that ANY violation of your rights will result in a ‘Live Fire Exercise,’” one such person wrote on Jones’ Infowars.com website. “If they come, come loaded for war!”

That incident showed how quickly militia enthusiasts now mobilize, thanks to the Internet. The National Guard rapidly scaled back its planned exercise, although it denied that the deluge of complaints had anything to do with its decision.

The sounds of violence are growing louder. The Idaho Citizens Constitutional Militia recently posted an opening for a “field sniper.” Around the same time, an Ohio Militia member, face hidden by a bandana and voice distorted electronically, posted a video to YouTube. “People need to wake up and start buying some of these,” he said as he displayed a semi-automatic rifle. “Things are real bad, and they’re going to get a lot worse.”

## Nativists to 'Patriots'

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*By David Holthouse*

Camp Vigilance, Calif. — A call to arms from ResistNet blares through this makeshift camp near the small community of Boulevard: “We all know what happens when you back an animal into a corner — it fights back. The way I see it, that’s exactly the direction this country is heading. They’re backing us into a corner. It’s getting to be time to fight back.”

Located two-and-a-half miles north of Mexico in the high, rugged desert of unincorporated eastern San Diego County, Camp Vigilance, known colloquially as “Camp V,” is a sizable Minuteman border vigilante compound situated amidst 170 privately owned acres.

Adjacent to active human and narcotics smuggling corridors, Camp V consists of roughly 100 tent camping sites, a half dozen or so full RV docking bays, a bunkhouse, a radio communications center, a mess hall and meeting grounds, all within a gated and well-guarded security perimeter.

On this night in late May, a dozen or so Minutemen are checking their weapons, testing batteries in their night-vision goggles and thermal-vision scopes, donning body armor and making other preparations for sundown-to-sunup reconnaissance patrols. A public address system plugged into a massive RV amplifies ResistNet, an Internet radio program broadcast by the Patriot Network, which promotes conspiracy theories and right-wing antigovernment militancy. Since the beginning of this year, ResistNet and other Patriot Network programs have become quite popular at Camp V, as well as other remote Minuteman outposts in southern California and Arizona.

The broadcast continues: “I can see the true American patriots are being backed into a corner. They’re getting ready to strike back at their captors, the greedy, evil vipers in the high offices of this land.”

Such exhortations have little to do with border security or undocumented immigration, the issues that launched the original Minuteman Project in 2005 and inspired its many spin-offs, imitators and splinter factions. Instead, the antigovernment screed ringing through Camp V represents a significant, ongoing shift in the nativist vigilante subculture, as major elements of various Minuteman organizations appear to be morphing into a new paramilitary wing of the resurgent antigovernment “Patriot” movement.

Increasingly, Minutemen are giving credence to the sort of fringe conspiracy theories that have long typified militia and other so-called Patriot groups. Although the Minuteman movement from its inception has been permeated with the Aztlán or “reconquista” conspiracy theory — which holds that the Mexican government is driving illegal immigration into the U.S. as part of a covert effort to “reconquer” the American Southwest — the conspiracy theories that are now taking root in the movement have little or nothing to do with border security or immigration. They include the belief that a massive cover-up has been conducted regarding Barack Obama’s birth certificate, which supposedly shows that he was born in Africa and is therefore ineligible to serve as president of the United States.

At several eastern San Diego County vigilante camps in mid-May, there were serious discussions about the global banking system being controlled by an ancient secret society called the Illuminati. Another theory floated involved a cult devoted to the Egyptian god of the afterlife, Osiris, operating within the NASA space agency and perhaps arranging with extraterrestrials for a hostile takeover of Earth.

Further indicating the nativist-to-Patriot drift of the Minutemen is the fact that in recent months a number of Minuteman factions have begun promoting the ideology of so-called “sovereign citizens,” a bizarre pseudo-legal philosophy whose adherents claim they’re not U.S. citizens and are not subject to federal or state laws, only to “common law courts” — a sort of people’s tribunal with no judges or lawyers. The most notorious advocates of sovereign citizens ideology include Oklahoma City bombing conspirator Terry Nichols and members of the now defunct Montana Freeman, a violent militia outfit. The larger Patriot movement is made up of tax protesters, militia members and sovereign citizens.

Accompanying the rise of conspiracy theories and sovereign citizen ideology within the Minuteman movement has been a spike in online and campfire chatter about the potential need for armed insurrection in the near future. This trend toward contemplated violence was most graphically illustrated by the May 30 home invasion murders of a Latino man and his 9-year-old daughter in Arivaca, Ariz., that were allegedly orchestrated by the leader of Minutemen American Defense to fund her group’s vigilante activities.

All of these disturbing nativist-to-Patriot trends have taken shape during a period in which, by all indications, the number of Latino immigrants attempting to cross the U.S. border has dropped to record lows, due in large part to the country’s faltering economy. According to a June report by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the number of

U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions fell to 724,000 last year. That marked the lowest level since 1973 and a decline of more than 50% from 2000, when apprehensions peaked at 1.67 million.

Despite this marked drop in undocumented border crossings, however, the number of Minuteman border operations, paramilitary training exercises and rallies continues to increase, and new Minuteman groups continue to form. What's changed is that instead of focusing exclusively on undocumented immigration, growing numbers of Minutemen and their fellow travelers now perceive immigration as merely a glaring symptom of a much broader problem. The larger problem, they believe, involves shadowy conspiracies threatening American sovereignty, unwelcome demographic changes polluting American culture, and a potentially totalitarian government, driven by an illegitimate president, bent on seizing all firearms, trampling the Constitution and imposing a fascist-socialist system on a pathetically docile citizenry.

"We're still concerned about the border intruders, but since this all started we've become aware of the fact that border intruders are just pawns in the big game," says "Jawbone," a member of the Campo Minutemen, a particularly hard-core faction based a few miles east of Camp V. "Stopping the border intruders isn't going to keep the shit from hitting the fan. If and when it does, we'll be ready. All this [Minuteman border operations] is just a dress rehearsal for the big dance."

One of the leaders of the Campo Minutemen, Britt "Kingfish" Craig, recently appeared on "Patriot's Pipeline Radio Show" along with co-guest Lloyd Marcus, the singer-songwriter responsible for "Tea Party Anthem," a protest ditty written for the "tea party" tax protests that took place across the country April 15.

"Tea Party Anthem" has become the Campo Minutemen fight song. Most of its members know at least the first verse by heart: "Mr. President! Your stimulus is sure to bust./It's just a socialist scheme./The only thing it will do/Is kill the American Dream."

As part of their campaign to stop President Obama from killing the American Dream, various Minuteman groups, including the Campo Minutemen, are distributing a sovereign citizen "criminal complaint petition" demanding that Obama appear before an "American Grand Jury" to answer charges of treason.

Hundreds of Minutemen signed the petition at a large Minuteman "muster," or rally, in Cochise County, Ariz., in late May. More than a dozen Minuteman organizations were represented at the rally, along with members of the Arizona Citizens Militia, a traditional Patriot militia that regularly conducts armed survivalist training exercises in the

mountains and woods of northern Arizona. During one recent exercise, members were “waterboarded” by a “professional interrogator.”

Also present at the Cochise County muster were members of Minuteman American Defense (MAD), the Everett, Wash.-based group led by Shawna Forde, who was arrested less than a month later in the May 30 double murder in Arivaca, Ariz. Also arrested were MAD Operations Director Jason Bush and a third MAD member. According to law enforcement authorities, the three believed the man they killed was a narcotics trafficker who kept large sums of money in his trailer.

Forde’s half-brother, Merrill Metzger, told the Arizona Daily Star that shortly before the murders Forde started talking about forming an “underground militia” that would be funded by robbing drug dealers. “She was talking about starting a revolution against the United States government,” he said.

Following her arrest, Forde was denounced by key Minuteman leaders including Jeff Schwilk, head of the San Diego Minutemen, a hard-line group with a well-deserved reputation for confrontational tactics. The fact that a hothead like Schwilk has become a de facto spokesman for the Minuteman movement indicates how radicalized the movement has become since its early days of media-friendly publicity stunts involving retirees sitting in lawn chairs armed only with binoculars.

In a mid-April mass E-mail to followers, Schwilk linked his group’s resistance to “the invasion from Mexico” with the greater cause of thwarting the “socialist takeover” of America. In the same E-mail, Schwilk announced the formation of the Patriot Coalition, made up of 23 organizations including Minuteman factions, tax-protest groups, pro-gun rights groups and two anti-immigration outfits listed as hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center. A subsequent press release described the common cause of the groups under the motto, “Secure Borders, Constitution and Rule of Law.” It stated that “Patriotic and Constitutional American grassroots groups” had come together to “fight the growing threats to our region and to the taxpaying American citizens.”

It used to be that Minutemen declared their vigilance against foreign invaders. Now they’re taking a stand against perceived enemies both foreign and domestic. “Revolution is brewing!” Schwilk declared.