

Activists or Terrorists? How Media Controls and Dictates ‘The Narrative’ in Burns, Oregon

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Global Research, January 08, 2016

[21st Century Wire](#) 7 January 2015

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Police State](#)
& [Civil Rights](#)

The majority of mainstream media reporting surrounding the Burns, Oregon, and Wildlife Refuge occupy protest has ranged from overly simplistic, to outright partisan. This story is a microcosm of media at its most divisive.

At its core, the narrative has become reduced to the government versus the militia or the government versus the people depending on one’s vantage point. On average, the mainstream media’s most neutral narrative is as follows:

Father-son duo of the Hammond ranching family started fires, were found guilty, went to jail, and a bunch of ‘militant’ and ‘anti-government’ militia men don’t like what the federal government are doing and used the event to take over a federal building in the Malheur Wildlife refuge.

Further to the left, the narrative looks more like:

“Armed Anti-government gang takes over federal building - Oregon community in crisis”(exact words from one mainstream media news anchor)

For most of the American media, that’s a good enough explanation. If it fits your political template, then that is all good. *Case closed...?*



Arizona rancher LaVoy Finicum sits watch overnight with media looking on (Image Credit: [Capital Blue/AP Photo/Rebecca Boone](#))

News media have become brand shopping. Do you want quality, fun, style, and value? Are you loyal to the name? Pick your poison. Reporting a story often times becomes *the selling* of a larger agenda, each agenda point with its own out-of-the-box marketing campaign and the corresponding planning that goes with it.

The entire development, for major news networks, is much easier to navigate and is less confusing than constantly revising varying degrees of moderation and extremism between allegiance-switching groups in the Middle East.

For a “case closed” perspective of the events from the **Department of Justice**, District of Oregon, after court rulings on the Hammonds in October of 2015, [read here](#) and stop.

The first line of defense is to know that these events rarely, if ever, spawn up overnight and happen in isolation. For a review and thorough sequence of events, detailing how the situation has escalated to what it is now, read the following from *21WIRE*, [here](#).

So is the media reporting events or peddling agendas? If they do both, maybe no one can tell the difference.

Things are not that easy and navigating through mainstream news media sludge takes work. Certainly, the White House’s gun-control marketing campaign this week has cast a convenient shadow over events in Oregon, and in order to force-in outside and unrelated issues, the matter at hand must be reduced to a quick and easy account by the media.

One could maintain that Oregon’s **Malheur Wildlife Refuge**, the Hammonds, and militias have all become components for a guided tour on how to think. The reason for this is

because any number of agendas and unrelated topics have been heaped upon the issue ranging from the Presidential race posturing, race itself, Islam, terrorism, gun control, and a host of distractive latch-on issues.

Simplify Matters

The contrasting sides are often set-up, or at least alluded to, immediately. This is what public relations operatives and political consultants refer to as “framing”. There are plenty of them working in media now, so don’t be surprised to see the exact same tactic deployed in politics as is commonplace in today’s ‘media’ industry.

In today’s media barrage, the title alone might suffice. A quick internet search of various article titles on the subject frame everything at a glance:

[*FBI Monitoring Armed Stand Off in Oregon National Wildlife Refuge*](#)

[*Armed Group Takes Over Federal Building Following Protest In Oregon*](#)

[*Oregon Armed Protest Leader Says Group Will Defend Occupied Building*](#)

The narrative is further presented as two sides with contrasting positions. Choose your position, and make your case. Most Americans will have been pre-conditioned to know where they are supposed to stand, and will quickly align accordingly. The framing here is usually a binary dialectic, or two sides only, with no grey area or middle ground. A or B, Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, pro-government or anti-government, Jedi or Sith? We all know the drill. Here they are mainstream media style:

The Hammonds: Victims of over-reach by a federal government, *or* rogue ranchers who are above the law with a fondness for starting fires?

The Bundy’s and outside militias: Lending a hand to fellow ranchers who are too over-matched to fight for themselves, *or* unwanted instigators on a personal anti-government crusade?

The Bureau of Land Management: Caretakers and stewards of land and resources, *or* the very embodiment of big government imposing its will through a vantage point of official power and authority?

Over-simplified, binary arguments almost never present real events. In reality, there are two or more sides to a story or event. This is what most media outlets do not want you to understand, and this is where the “art of the delivery” comes in, by steering the audience to the “**right**” choice.

When reporting on the events in question in Oregon, the mainstream media imply, or outright allege, that protesters and the militia members who converged on the Malheur Wildlife Refuge intend to draw *first contact* and start a shootout (as seen later in a *CNN* clip below). The analysis about a trigger-happy militia is pondered endlessly by mainstream news personalities, despite repeated statements to the contrary by organizers of the militias in question. This is followed by an endless string of pundits and experts expressing their righteous indignation that ‘the federal government can’t let these militants get away with this!’, and so on.

Activists or Terrorists?

Part of the process of “owning” the narrative and shaping public opinion is to define the problem and the people involved with quick and easily identifiable labels. Among other things, this allows the media to avoid doing any real investigation into the core issues, and simply surf the partisan waves.

In Burns, Oregon, this never happened. Instead the media have labeled the Hammonds as “arsonists” and the Bundys as “terrorists”.



The mainstream media have worked diligently to characterize the protest’s leader, **Ammon Bundy** (photo, left), son of now iconic Nevada rancher, Cliven Bundy, as an armed insurgent and [a domestic terrorist](#). This is likely do to the fact that ‘journalists’ are unfamiliar with the fact that Ammon Bundy has stepped into a political role as a public and state lands advocate since 2014 - bringing attention to the thousands of ranchers and farmers in the southwestern states facing federal vs state land management issues, and has spoken publicly many times since the Bundy stand-off in 2014. Viewed through this prism, the Hammond protest and occupation of the Malhuer Wildlife Refuge is quite obviously a *political* event. But that’s not how the media are treating this.

Today saw one of the lowest points in partisan media. In one of the worst displays of hatchet-journalism by the mainstream media, the [Oregon LIVE](#), CNN and others, have begun digging through all the personal records and finances of the Bundy sons and other protesters, including their [businesses loans](#), personal property records and even *traffic violations* - in a clear effort to try and slander them in public for matters *not* related at all to the public lands issue. If only the Oregon LIVE and CNN would apply that same level of effort to investigating the [Hammond case](#), or for the thousands of other farmers who have been [forcibly bankrupted and put out of business](#) over the last two decades.

What “guilt-by-association” words better fit today’s on edge atmospherics than “terrorists and terrorism”? These are precisely the terms which media began saturating the internet with moments after this event hit the headlines. Various left-wing hashtag campaigns like **#YallQaeda** and **#VanillaISIS** were strewn all over Twitter and have been trending ever since. This has provided a soft cushion on which larger media ‘journalists’ and organizations can comfortably bounce around pejorative terms without receiving too much criticism. Here’s one choice example:



The Baxter Bean
@TheBaxterBean



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REMINDER: #YallQaeda Wants Federal Land 'Returned' To Them That Was Never 'Theirs' [washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/w](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/w)

...



RETWEETS 132 LIKES 99



3:00 PM - 6 Jan 2016



See tweet [here](#).

Amazingly, even long-established news organizations, such as the *Washington Post*, have [published articles](#) which question why the militia are *not* called 'terrorists', while *Fox Radio* [ponders whether or not](#) they are 'patriots' or 'terrorists'.

The drive for the pejorative label is in full effect. This comes as no surprise, as the mainstream media have been swimming in confusion the last few years, with ever-fluctuating moderation levels of jihadists based upon what group is being backed by the West or its allies at any given moment. However, calling an American citizen or group 'terrorist' immediately defines where you stand with regards to protesters or members of the militia.

CNN gets right after it, throws down the gauntlet, and calls the militias in question terrorists without hesitation. The video below is a typical example of agenda driven "news reporting" that brings in unrelated issues of race, the Muslim religion, and loosely slapping a terrorist label over what might best be described as breaking and entering. Through their presentation, the event itself slightly matters and the story becomes everything but the

event. Instead of an analysis into how the situation evolved, time is spent on painting a good versus bad narrative, which is done simply by applying the terrorist label to the militias. *Watch:*

As seen toward the end of the clip, the true issue and fear for the establishment, as voiced through CNN's television stars, is that people might see results from citizen movements with regards to a *reverse* order – of people controlling *their* government. If such an idea were to ever catch on, the people might actually believe that they own the country and public lands, and that would be intolerable. Proponents of a strong central government might fear that those who *administer* might return towards a “public service” model, as opposed to a *federal service* model.

In reality, the happy mediums between demands, law, authority, and obedience are more calculus, than single digit addition. In other words, it's complicated, and no one hates complications more than media and partisan politicians. Through polarizing the issue, drawing sides, and picking a righteous winner, CNN sides with its apparent partner in Washington and presents the story in such a manner. You can even hear the sadness in the voices as they discuss the possibility that the government might “wait out” the militia instead of coming in with aggressive force and establishing ‘who is boss.’ It might behoove any good journalist or pundit to pause and ask: *are the various militias in question really terrorists, and do their acts constitute terrorism?*

Here is the definition of “domestic terrorism” and the “federal crime of terrorism” [as delineated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI): “Domestic terrorism” means activities with the following three characteristics:

- Involve acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law;
- *Appear intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination. or kidnapping; and...*
- *Occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.*

18 U.S.C. Sec 2332b defines the term “federal crime of terrorism” as an offense that:

- *Is calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government by intimidation or coercion, or to retaliate against government conduct; and...*
- *Is a violation of one of several listed statutes, including Sec 930(c) (relating to killing or attempted killing during an attack on a federal facility with a dangerous weapon); and Sec 1114 (relating to killing or attempted killing of officers and employees of the U.S.).*

Granted, America seems to be expanding this definition every year, as evidenced by the above inclusion of “retaliate against government conduct” on the list. This seems to indicate that any protest can be characterized as ‘terrorism’ should the government chose to press there. Those calling these militias ‘terrorists’, seem to be taking only “(ii)” from the above definition of Domestic Terrorism and are “running with it.”

Again, the FBI states in their own words above that the three characteristics are required. Nowhere does the FBI say, *one of the above* is terrorism, or *some of the above* is terrorism. As champions of the law and enforcing it, and assuming care was taken to review the definitions by many, one would believe that they meant what they wrote—and wrote what they meant. The militia is a citizen's right [clearly stated](#) in the US Constitution, but perhaps breaking and entering or 'unlawfully' occupying is not legal.... *but terrorism?*

What about committing the "federal crime of terrorism" from [18 U.S.C. \(United States Code\) Sec 2332b above](#)? Clearly, the militias are there, openly, with guns and stating they will defend themselves if necessary. Or, are they simply there and carrying fire arms within the law (yes, it is legal to carry a gun in the US)? The definition might appear to be in the eye of the beholder, but from the government's perspective, the definition seems highly elastic.

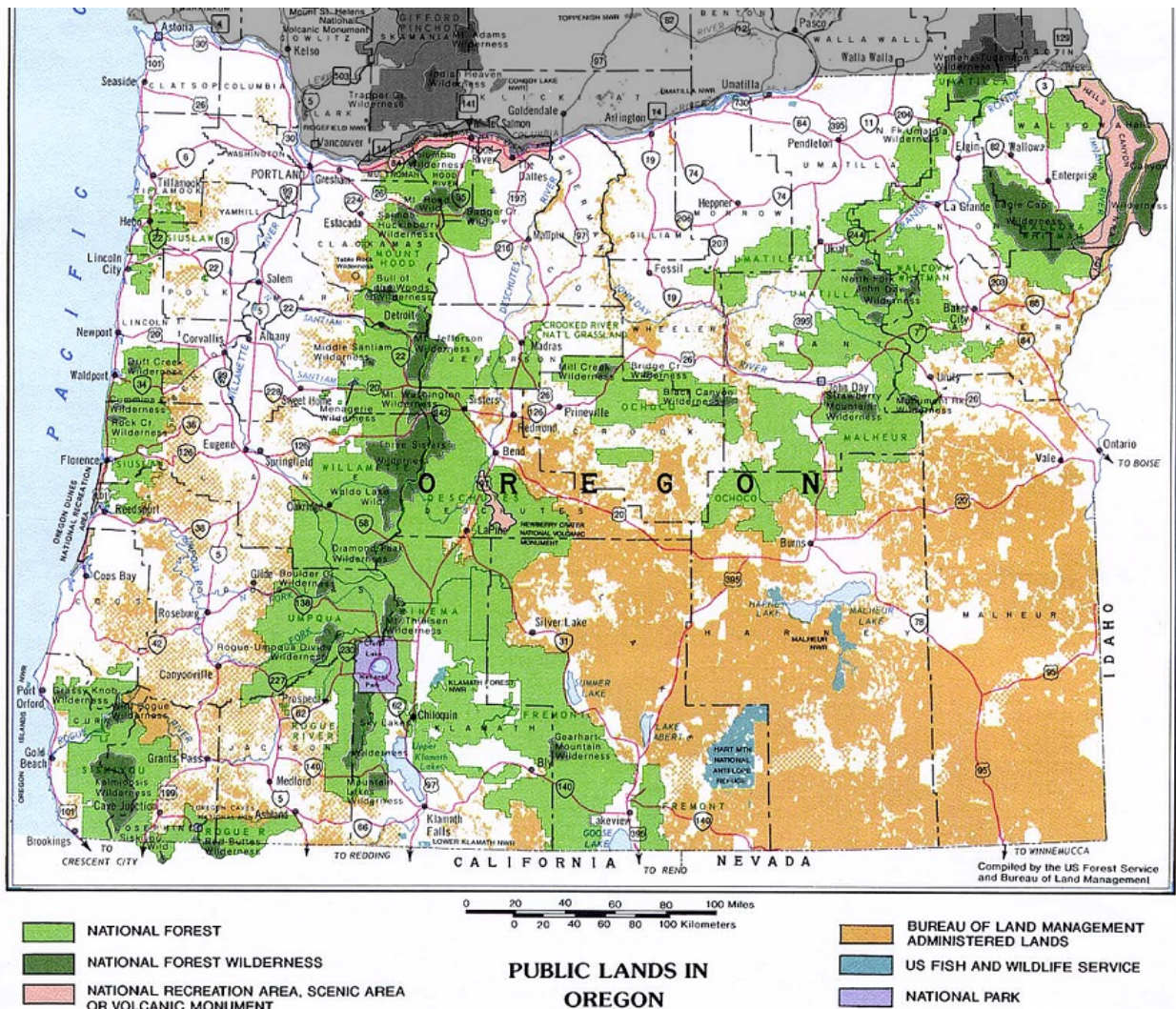
CNN and the Washington Post are telling you whom to side with through their narrative and 'terrorist' labels for the militias in question.

Depending on how one views the world with regards to the issue, along with their ability to process information presented to them, determines what side they are on, or if they are even on a side. Who has the bigger agenda and the bigger stake, the government, or the militias and ranchers? Is it really about Land Management and/or People Management, or are both inter-related?

Let's start with the land itself. As noted in the Congressional Research Service's 2014 document [Federal Land Ownership](#), the United States governs, oversees, owns, or otherwise has authority and jurisdiction over land primarily through the following 5 agencies:

- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- The Forestry Service (FS)
- The Fish and Wild Life Service (FWS)
- The National Park Service (NPS)
- The Department of Defense (DoD)

Here is what Oregon looked like with regard to the above agencies and some of their sub-departments in 1996, now twenty years ago:



Oregon Public Lands 1996. (Image: [Wiki Commons](#))

The *Federal Land Ownership* document, cited above, also notes that the overall public land managed by the BLM has dropped nearly 25 million acres from 1990 to 2013. However, this comes mostly from almost 22 million acres within Alaska alone. Within Oregon, the state in question, the BLM alone has gained almost 550,000 acres to manage from the already color-dense map above, and is set to takeover [another 2.5 million acres](#) with their proposed Owyhee Canyonlands ‘National Monument’ – an area larger than Yellowstone National Park – set to be shut-off to the state and placed under BLM control.

Part of the larger Department of the Interior (DOI), the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) [Mission Statement](#) is: “To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America’s public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.” According to the [BLM website](#), they oversee more than 245 million acres and over 700 million mineral and “sub surface” acres, with a multi-billion dollar budget and about 10,000 employees. The BLM also claims to be one of the few federal agencies that generate revenue, based largely on 4.3 billion dollars of onshore oil and gas development and numerous other “land deals” brokered by the BLM.

Hundreds of millions of acres is vast. Most people probably see the need for a diligent and upstanding management of it, to include the natural resources and wildlife found on the land, as well as the resources beneath it. Understanding that a “free for all” of destroying resources combined with a full bore resource grab would be adverse, many would likely

contribute to the oversight of it. Being entrusted with such a job could be seen as an honorable undertaking – *by citizens... for citizens*. But when does stewardship and land management turn into ‘territorial control’ by Washington DC, which invariably leads to an institutional vendetta, or “sending a message”, or becomes a means to define boundaries between authorities and their subjects? Undoubtedly, this is what seems to be happening all over the western states, and with small farms being victims, picked off, one by one by a superior force – the federal government.

So the federal government in Washington DC is treating State public land as its “**territory**”, when, according to the US Constitution, *it is not*.

*Watch as Oregon Congressman **Greg Walden** (R) delivers an incredibly detailed and impassioned speech on the Capitol floor yesterday, outlining the scale of this problem in his state:*

The fact that the mainstream media have not given this issue any serious consideration as journalists speaks to the systemic problem which the public now faces in a *post-Fourth Estate America*, where mainstream media’s interests are mostly married to those of central government. The public stand to lose a lot in this polarizing environment.

Many Constitutional purists and opponents of federal government “over reach” and abuse of power argue that the government doesn’t really own the land. By both the letter, and *spirit* of the law, there is a real Constitutional case to be made there. Unfortunately, it all quickly turns into a debate on power, control, and authority between the federal government and the states, further complicated by who happens to be in positions of authority for each.

They point to [Article I, Section 8, of the United States Constitution](#) which authorizes Congress to “*exercise like Authority over all Places purchased by the Consent of the Legislature of the State in which the Same shall be, for the Erection of Forts, Magazines, Arsenals, dock-yards, and other needful Buildings,*” and they throw out the very premise of government land **ownership** outside of those parameters. The larger issue, beyond the Hammond family in particular, is also centered around jurisdiction — literally. Jurisdiction over land and resources inevitably stem from arrangements involving ownership and control. Who is in charge of what, and to what degree? Whose goals are ultimately being achieved and who is affected are things all citizens would be wise to ask themselves.

Are the Hammonds being crushed from above in accordance to what they did and were found guilty of and does the punishment fit?

The Oregonian reports:

There’s nobody in history who has gone to federal prison for burning a few acres of public property,” said Melodi Molt, a Harney County rancher and former president of Oregon CattleWomen. “It’s not right.” The Oregon Farm Bureau said the second prison term is “gross government overreach and the public should be outraged.” And then there is what some locals see as a government land grab.

The Hammonds in late 2014 agreed to pay the federal government \$400,000

to settle a lawsuit seeking to force them to pay more than a \$1 million in costs for fighting fires they set. The Hammonds paid \$200,000 right away and paid the rest Thursday. The settlement also required the Hammonds to give the land bureau first chance at buying a particular ranch parcel adjacent to public land if they intended to sell. For some, this was evidence that the government all along was after the Hammond ground to add to its Steens Mountain holdings.

The Oregonian continues, stating that the Hammonds originally served jail time starting in 2012 under the [Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 \(AEDPA\)](#). The father, Dwight Hammond, aged 73, was sentenced to three months and the son, Steve, to one year. A possible 5 year sentence, according to U.S. District Judge Michael Hogan at the Hammonds' original 2012 sentencing, would be unconstitutional and ["a sentence which would shock the conscience."](#) After serving their time, both father and son were dragged back in front of a federal bench and re-sentenced to a full 5 year term - in what many believe was just the latest chapter in a federal vendetta against the family, waged in part by then U.S Attorney for the State of Oregon, [Amanda Marshall](#).

A *New Yorker* [article](#) unabashedly calls the AEDPA law, "... one of the worst statutes ever passed by Congress [headed by Bob Dole] and signed into law by a President [President Clinton]. The heart of the law is a provision saying that, even when a state court misapplies the Constitution, a defendant cannot necessarily have his day in federal court."

So is this the new image of a terrorist breeding ground and rallying point?

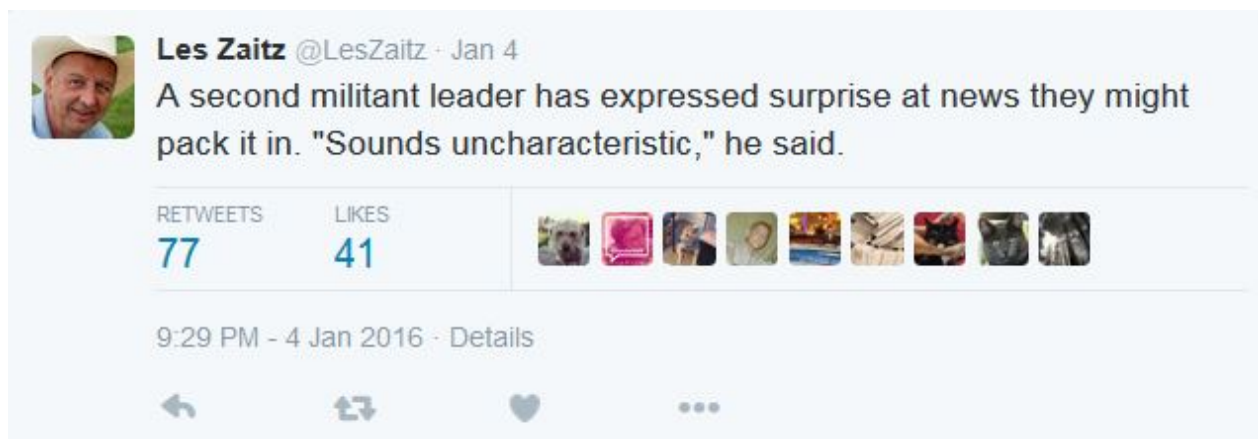


(Image: [Oregon Live/The Oregonian](#))

To be fair, not everyone is happy about the outsiders. Caught in the midst of it all are citizens such as a local resident, Candy Tiller, [quoted](#) by *Oregon Public Broadcasting*, saying, “I’m worried that there’s a trigger-happy idiot out there... And maybe a law enforcement officer or somebody else makes a move that makes him think they’re pulling a gun and he’s going to shoot... I don’t want that. I don’t want that for anybody... This is crazy. This does not fit. These people need to go away.”

Locals will always feel the tension best, and no scenario would play to the establishment and mainstream media narrative better than an Waco-style gunfight and siege, also playing out on LIVE television. Based on the current situation report, the federal government would be the one escalating tension by pouring hundreds of assets into the small town and turning the area into a quasi-military occupation, as Washington clearly did with [Bundy Ranch in 2014](#).

Whether it’s a Greenpeace protest, Occupy Wall Street, or Bundy Ranch, federal agencies have tried and tested methods besides overt force, in order to weaken and ultimately bring down any protest. The first method is disinformation – a **“protest leak”** about a ‘split’ within the group, or ‘rumors’ about a member of the group wanting to leave. This type of maneuver might look something like this:



See the tweet [here](#).

The other method of disinformation is a **“government leak”** designed to scare off other activists from coming to the event, but also to jar those inside of the protest and their families and as loved ones look on. Whether it is true or not is beside the point. This type of sensational storyline is designed make its way on to the internet and quickly go viral, and might look something like [this](#):

“FBI preparing for Waco-style raid in Oregon...”

Similarly, during the Bundy Ranch standoff in 2014, a slightly more outlandish story was planted in the alternative media about [Eric Holder authorizing a drone strike on Bundy Ranch](#). Not surprisingly, the story was complete fiction. As wildly unbelievable as that story was, it worked incredibly well for the federal government because the bulk of the militia camped out at the ranch, a group known as **Oathkeepers**, [immediately became frightened, packed up and left](#).

Another example could be found in a Tweet released at the height of the Bundy Ranch stand-off in 2014, claiming that the government had shut down cell phone towers in a “communications black-out” (presumably ‘preparing to attack’). Though this never actually

happened, one could easily view this as an attempt to scare away members of the public from going to the ranch to support the cause:

Bundy family reports cell towers near ranch have been shut down, preventing communication & video uploads. [#BundyRanch](#)

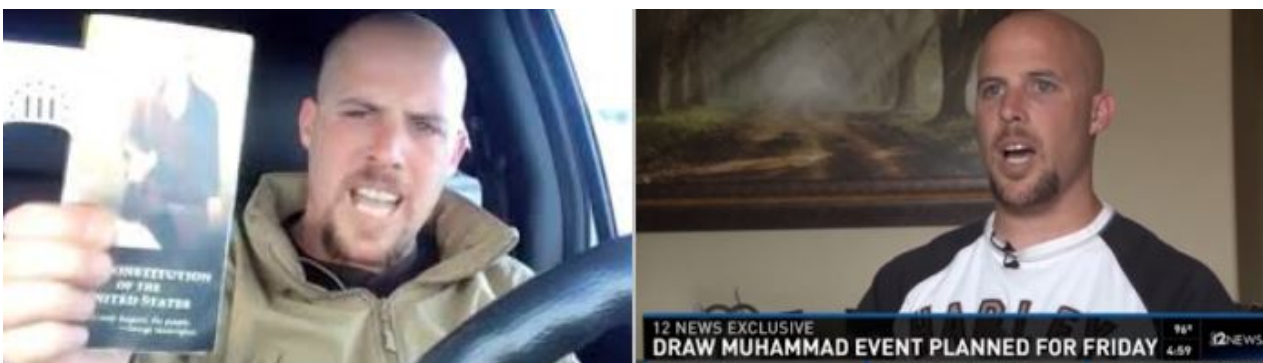
— Paul Joseph Watson (@PrisonPlanet) April 11, 2014

If the disinformation fails, the next level of federal subterfuge is usually to embed or ‘plant’ a federal informant(s) or agent provocateur (s) inside of the protest. Typically, this is done very early on in the process, but also becomes much easier once more people pour into the area. With a “patriots unite” call to stand with the militias, as seen in the below video, it’s almost impossible for organizers to ever know who could be on-site, or what off-centered ‘rebel’ or individual would simply “just show up”, either to make a name for themselves through media coverage, or even worse - by starting some serious trouble between activists or with law enforcement.

In terms of discrediting the protest in the court of public opinion, the Hammond Protest could field no one better than tabloid media mascot, like **Jon Ritzheimer** of [Anti-Islam protesting fame](#). Ritzheimer quickly become the mainstream media’s target of ridicule and used to discredit any of the other protesters. In addition to his armed march on American mosques, Ritzheimer also tried to grab headlines for traveling to Michigan to *kidnap*, or make a “citizens arrest” as Ritzheimer called it, of the elderly Senator **Debbie Stabenow** (D) - because she supported the international *Iran Nuclear Deal*.

What’s more amazing is how Ritzheimer could threaten a Senator and also publicly incite a mass armed provocation against a single religious minority group - and *not* be arrested and at least placed on probation (taken off the street). Maybe he has the same lawyer as the *New Black Panthers*.

Whether this is by design, or not, the effect is undeniable. This exact scenario has already played out in Burns, Oregon with the mainstream media casting Ritzheimer in the role of flag-waving xenophobe and [‘militia nut-job’](#), with the added knock-on effect of painting “constitutionalists” as mentally unstable, ‘militant extremists.’



Professional media villain Jon Ritzheimer recorded his own [‘martyrdom video’](#) before heading up to the protest.

As the event unfolds many scenarios could happen. The worst outcome of events in Oregon would be that the Hammond family issue loses the spotlight, and the public lands issue

becomes obscured by a media desperate for a anti-gun narrative and obsessed with the ridiculous antic of synthetic YouTube actors attached to event.

Only the craziest of megalomaniac government officials, robotic plants, or glory-seeking wackos would **really** want this to escalate, led by a depraved sensationalized media, and with a public glued to the screen "Fahrenheit 451 style" with a bag of *Cheetos*.

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