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US a safe haven for paramilitary groups that provide legal mercenary training

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Training terrorists has long been associated with small third-world nations with leftist tendencies. But the swamps of the American Southeast and the forests of the Midwest are increasingly the settings for schools in the black arts of mayhem.

Only a limited number of paramilitary training camps are known to be operating within the United States. They are organized principally by extremist groups (for their own members), by those who have a

doomsday vision of the future in which people will fight among themselves for limited resources, and by former soldiers who share their military knowledge for a fee. Some of these groups operate in compliance with existing state and federal laws.

A Senate subcommittee is investigating the degree to which the US is a haven for paramilitary groups and a training ground for future terrorists.

Jeremiah Denton (R) of Alabama, chairman of the subcommittee on security

and terrorism of the Senate Judiciary Committee, says he is concerned that US law enforcement officials don't have the necessary legal clout to preempt terrorist and paramilitary crimes in America.

"We haven't felt terrorism in this country as have Turkey, Italy, and West Germany. We must develop a national terrorism strategy and policy, and determine how to implement that policy."

Senator Denton's comments come at a time of heightened concern about ties between white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups in the US. In addition, there have been reports of meetings between former members of the Ku Klux Klan and Louis Farrakhan, leader of a Black Muslim group called the Nation of Islam. Mr. Farrakhan has repeatedly made statements of an anti-Semitic nature.

Lawmakers are also concerned about the impact of nonideological training camps for would-be soldiers of fortune. Denton and other members of Congress are looking for ways to ensure that America's apparent love affair with violent movie heroes such as "Rambo" does not translate into vigilantism.

At issue is whether the US has gone too far in reforms that restrict federal agencies from investigating subversive groups in America. Under current laws, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents are prohibited from conducting surveillance and collecting detailed intelligence about US-based groups or individuals, unless there is reason to believe a crime is about to be committed.

Some officials feel that restrictions on domestic intelligence gathering leave the US vulnerable to armed subversion.

Other observers maintain that the threat to constitutional liberty posed by a government that regularly spies on its own citizens is much larger than any threat posed by a small number of radical ideological groups.

Recent indications are that, despite the restrictions, the federal government has experienced more successes in domestic security cases than failures.

While there have been four terrorist-related incidents in the US this year, federal officials have noted that 17 potential terrorist plots have been thwarted by the FBI during the year. Officials add that the number of terrorist actions is declining, from 100 in 1977, to 31 in 1983, to 13 in '84.

Last spring, federal agents foiled a Sikh plot to assassinate Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during a planned trip to the US. Several Sikh students are reported to have attended a commando training camp in Alabama to acquire skills needed to carry out the assassination.

Senator Denton's concern is that US-based training camps may be helping to

produce a new generation of domestic terrorists.

According to Wayne R. Gilbert, a deputy assistant director at the FBI, paramilitary, survivalist, or mercenary training camps are now operating in 11 states across the country.

Groups mentioned as running such camps include the Ku Klux Klan; Posse Comitatus; The Covenant, Sword and the Arm of the Lord; and the Aryan Nations Church.

In the past three years, 56 individuals from these groups have been arrested on weapons charges by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. According to Daniel M. Hartnett of the ATF, the four groups share common objectives.

"Most of these groups are antigovernment, racist, and anti-Semitic," he says. "They stockpile arsenals of weapons . . . and train their supporters

to use those weapons."

Mr. Hartnett adds that the groups "have shown a willingness to commit violent crimes to further their cause."

Ten members of The Order, a violent offshoot of the white-supremacist Aryan Nations Church, are facing a 21-count federal indictment in Seattle charging that they were plotting a right-wing revolution that would have specifically included the assassination of Jews, blacks, and Hispanics. The revolution was reportedly aimed at overthrowing what the group called the US's "Zionist occupational government."

The rebellion was to be funded through bank robberies and attacks on armored cars.

Members of the The Order have also been linked to the violent Arkansas-based Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord. CSA is said by federal officials to have financed its extensive arsenal with loot from an armored-car robbery carried out by members of The Order. Two members of The Order were in CSA's heavily armed Arkansas compound last April when state and federal officials arrested CSA leader James Ellison.

Two weeks ago, Ellison was sentenced to 20 years in prison on federal racketeering and weapons charges. Some 50 pounds of dynamite, 146 rifles, 30 machine guns, 9 silencers, 3 mines, 2 anti-aircraft rockets, and other weapons and equipment were confiscated at the CSA compound, according to federal officials.

Federal officials say that racist groups are not the only organizations they are concerned about. Federal prosecutors recently announced the arrest of 18 alleged members of Los Macheteros and the Armed Forces of National Liberation, Puerto Rican terrorist groups active in New York and elsewhere.

The FBI is conducting domestic security investigations of 18 organizations in the US, according to an agency spokesman. He declined to name the groups under investigation.

