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NJOHSP Podcast *Intelligence. Unclassified.* Episode 22: One-on-One with J.J. MacNab

Rosemary Martorana, Director of Intelligence, New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness: Hello. I am Rosemary Martorana, Director of Intelligence here at the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP) and you are listening to *Intelligence. Unclassified.* This podcast is exactly what the title states: unclassified information about current trends in homeland security for the state of New Jersey, as well as educational information and resources for your awareness. Although it is produced every month, we aim to stay on top of current events and will often offer additional content. If this is your first time listening, then thanks for coming! Please feel free to add this podcast to your RSS feed or iTunes. You can also follow NJOHSP on Twitter @NJOHSP and Facebook. All links can be found in the show notes and on our website www.njohsp.gov.

Kim Brown, Deputy Director of the Analysis Bureau, New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness: J.J. MacNab writes a regular column at Forbes on the subject of violent extremism and is a fellow with George Washington University's Program on Extremism. She has spent 18 years researching anti-government, sovereign citizen, and militia groups throughout the United States and Canada and has a book entitled, *The Seditious: Inside the Explosive World of Anti-Government Extremism in America* scheduled for publication this winter by St. Martin's Press. Ms. MacNab has worked as a consultant with the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Joint Terrorism Task Force, the US Marshals, the Department of Justice, the IRS, and the Canadian Provincial Police, providing background information and intelligence on various leaders within the anti-government community. Thank you for being here with us. First, I wanted to talk a little about you and ask how did you enter into this field and why Sovereign Citizens?

J.J. MacNab, Senior Fellow, George Washington University Center for Cyber and Homeland Security, Program on Extremism: It was a little bit of an accident. I originally was a financial planner and I had my own firm in San Francisco. I had someone approach me who had been part of a tax scam. He was an elderly gentleman and they sold him this plan and they told him that if he just gave them all of his money and put it offshore in an account in Belize that he would never have to pay taxes again. Well, the IRS came after him. Meanwhile, the bad guys had run off with his money. To his dying day, he did not believe he had been scammed. He really thought that he was doing a patriotic thing by putting his money offshore. I thought that was kind of interesting.

Brown: Is that the start of your interest in the sovereign citizen movement?

MacNab: That came a little bit later. The group was originally tax protesters. This would have been in the late 90s. I had heard about the anti-government movement when Timothy McVeigh brought down the building in Oklahoma City. I did not know it was the same group when I was looking into tax protesters. I did know that the group that had stolen from him continued to market throughout the Bay area for years after this gentleman had died and they had all of his money. I got angry. I went to the IRS and said, "Why can you not shut these guys down?" And they said that they would take care of it and I think two years passed and they had done nothing. I went to the US Senate and asked why can they not shut this down, which triggered a hearing. Push came to shove, and after a few years they had shut down most of the promoters. And at that point, this tax protest movement shifted and they turned into the sovereign citizens. The economy had gone down. They were now selling debt elimination rather than tax scams. It was not until that shift occurred that I realized, after all those years, this was the same movement that has spawned Timothy McVeigh.

Brown: It is an interesting group of individuals and that is something that we have in New Jersey. Nothing violent that we have seen so far, but again we are seeing a lot of paperwork within the court system as well as during traffic stops.

MacNab: The problem with the paperwork is that eventually they are going to figure out it does not work and that is where the violence comes in. It takes a few years of going through the court systems and consistently losing before they turn to violent options.

Brown: I would like to switch gears a little bit and talk about domestic terrorism and some of the research that you have been doing. What do you think is the greatest misconception when investigating domestic terrorist groups?

MacNab: I think the biggest problem is that most of the literature and research that is available out there was written prior to 2002 and it was all looking at the 1960-1995 groups. They were originally white supremacist groups, they were originally rural, they were the West, they were the Midwest. A lot of things that were present in that time period are completely different today. And so, if you are looking at older literature, you are looking at experts that, for example, have moved from right-wing extremism, to ISIS, or to al-Qa'ida, or to Islamic terrorism. Everything they have said then is out-of-date now. You cannot really work off of old stereotypes. You cannot work off of old data.

Brown: I am sure the groups are constantly evolving, so it is very hard to pin down and understand the group, especially if they are taking from different ideologies.

MacNab: Sure. If you are an officer out on the road and you pull someone over and he is not what you would think of, your typical stereotype of a man with a long beard looking like ZZ Top, he is not in militia clothes, you think, "OK, I do not have to worry about this being a sovereign citizen." Today, they are young, old, male, female, black, white, Asian, American Indian. It does not matter.

Brown: Absolutely. Let us take a look at the occupation in Oregon. We heard a lot about that, more so on Twitter than the news. Why do you think this one played out differently than the Bundy standoff?

MacNab: This one was different mostly because it was aggressive. The Bundy Standoff in Nevada was considered to be defensive. They were coming to take Bundy's cattle off of his land. And Bundy had told the supporters that they were aiming guns at his grandkids' heads. They were coming to defend an old rancher. In the Malheur Refuge takeover, it was aggressive. They drove from a different state up to Oregon and took over a federal building with guns. A lot of the militia world did not want anything to do with aggressive. They are willing to be defensive, but when it comes to doing something more confrontational, they draw the line.

Brown: When we look at the standoff in Nevada, it is just those individuals that we would consider more extreme than the general militia population?

MacNab: Yes. It was like a test. The movement was ripe. They were waiting for something to do. They were waiting for some standoff to catch their attention. They had been agitating for months. When Cliven Bundy's stand took place, they were there within three days from all across the country. They came from as far away as New Hampshire, rolling into town with guns. There were several hundreds of them, whereas Malheur Refuge, at most, I think, had thirty.

Brown: If we look forward at these militia groups, what do you think they will do differently for future standoffs then?

MacNab: I think that question is wide open right now. The people that were in charge of the Malheur Refuge are currently in prison. That has a huge chilling factor. And I am hoping that is enough to stop the movement from another aggressive takeover of land. At the same time, there was a martyr in that situation. LaVoy Finicum was an Arizona rancher, who was killed during a felony traffic stop. He went for a gun and they killed him. Now that they have a martyr, they kind of have their Waco/Ruby Ridge scenario. They have their catalyst to move them forward. And the last time we had that catalyst it produced Timothy McVeigh.

Brown: I know there were some open source reporting that the information regarding Finicum did not actually play out the way it happened or the way we heard it happened. There were reports, I believe, that the officers drew their weapons first or that he had no weapon. Could that discredit law enforcement and further drive the militia groups and maybe increase recruitment even further than the death of Finicum?

MacNab: Yes. It is a constant problem in this movement. An event happens, there are immediate stories that are told, and they become lore, they become folklore, they become bigger and bigger. And even after information comes out that corrects those misconceptions, they do not care. They continue to tell the old lies. In this particular case, you have two women in the car with Finicum and they both talked, right afterwards, about having seen him being killed. They talked about witnessing it. One of them said that he was down on his knees with his hands above his head and he was shot point-blank in the face nine times. Well, he was not. In fact, when you actually watch the videos, because one of them was recording in the interior of his car, we learned that neither one of them saw the shooting. Mrs. Finicum, LaVoy's widow, had an autopsy done and did not release the information that he was not shot nine times. She also did not release the information that he did have a gun that was given to him at Christmastime by his stepson.

Brown: Interesting. I guess there will be a lot of information out there created by those that are supporters of militia groups to further the ideology and continue to make Finicum the martyr for the organization, or the group.

MacNab: It was a little bit like this at Bundy Ranch, as well. Cliven Bundy talked about how there were two men on the hill, pointing guns down at his family. There is one photo, out of the thousands of photos taken at Bundy Ranch, there is one photo of two gentlemen up on a hill wearing black, in the desert. The ideas of them being snipers is a little bit absurd, you do not even see any guns. That was somehow turned into two hundred men, snipers, surrounding his ranch with their guns pointing at the heads of little children. And it got bigger and bigger and bigger, and no one corrected the story.

Brown: If we look at a few of plots that we have seen by anti-government individuals, they have attempted to use explosives. Similar to international groups, who have attempted to do the same and were unsuccessful, what do you think the draw is? Is it not easier to use a gun? Why go for the explosive? I understand the big bang of more people, but what if they are unsuccessful or law enforcement is stopping them before it can even come to fruition?

MacNab: I think the use of explosives fills an emotional need. It is a big, public bang and it gets a lot of press. I think we have so much gun violence today that maybe it gets a little bounce in the press, maybe it does not. Whereas something blowing up is always going to get a lot of attention.

Brown: I guess that is right. We have seen in West Virginia, not too long ago, an individual attempted to use explosives at a federal building and he was arrested prior to anything happening. I believe he was working with an informant. Do you think that there is any thinking behind these groups that when they are reaching out for assistance, similar to the international terrorist groups, that the likelihood that they are working with law enforcement, is that even a thought or do they think they are talking to other like-minded people that want to do the same thing?

MacNab: The good news is that, so far, they have not been very smart. They actually think that if someone has that look and feel of a patriot, then it is one of them.

Brown: Let us talk a little bit about sovereign citizens. In New Jersey, we have a number of sovereign citizens, several which have used paper terrorism, filing liens against law enforcement. And there are a number of states that recently passed or are in the process of passing laws criminalizing the filing of fraudulent liens. Do you think that this will stop that sovereign citizen tactic?

MacNab: I do. I watch a lot of the chatter online where they go to help other newbies to the movement, or where they go to sell their products to the new people in the movement, and they talk about those cases. When you are looking at five years of jail time for filing a piece of paper, that has a serious effect. I would recommend that for the states that have this as a problem.

Brown: That is interesting. One of our analysts is creating a product looking at the different states that have similar laws to that of New Jersey, attempting to assess how effective the law is in prosecuting these individuals.

MacNab: You might want to consider about carrying it to something beyond public officials. If you are a landlord and you have one of these as a tenant, they can destroy your life with liens. And yet, you would not have the same protection. You might want to look into these people who file frivolous liens because they are going to have problems legally, not just against officials.

Brown: Thank you. Looking at the presidential election, it has been interesting watching these debates. Do you think there are any links between mainstream political debates and controversies and extremist activity?

MacNab: I do. I am not sure it is intentional. I think the main problem we have seen, which we have seen for a while with the Tea Party, is the Tea Party uses a lot of rhetoric. And the Tea Party rhetoric uses the same language, the same ideas, the same revolution, the same promises that the extremist groups use, but the extremist groups take them literally. The Tea Party people, I think, understand it is rhetoric. I think it is an unfortunate side effect. I mean rhetoric is strong all across the board right now. It is going to incite people to violence. I just think the political leaders need to be a little more responsible in what they say.

Brown: Absolutely. We have seen, based on what individuals say, how the public is responding to that. That is definitely something I think needs to be done. Our last question, looking ahead at 2016 into 2017, how do you see the anti-government group tactics and activities changing?

MacNab: I think it is going to become far more confused. You have had distinct groups in the past—sovereign citizens, tax protesters, militia, survivalists, Oathkeepers, 3 Percenters—and I think they are just becoming one big messy family right now. I think militia guys are now using sovereign citizen techniques and tax protesters are waking up again and trying to join militias. I also think that they are going to be looking at merging with other extremist groups outside of the Patriot movement, left-wing extremism, for example. We have seen some of it with Bundy Ranch. Anonymous, the hacking group, was aiding some of the Bundy Ranch people. Occupy took an interest. Some of the groups that are traditionally left-wing extremist, I think, have realized that they are in the same boat. They are equally unhappy. They feel disenfranchised. They do not have any control over their lives, the government, or anything else. This is their way of acting out.

Brown: I guess it is also possible that we would see these individuals latching on to some international ideologies, as well. We could look at Zale Thompson of the New Black Panther Party.

MacNab: The New Black Panther Party and sovereign citizens have a bit of an overlap. We will have to see where that goes. I noticed when, for example, al-Qa'ida released the list of books on bin Laden's shelf and talked about the papers he had just last year. I am skimming through it and finding right-wing material. I am finding information about how to channel anti-government groups in America. I thought that was fascinating. One of the things I thought was so interesting, was that during the Ferguson protests, ISIS was trying to recruit some of the sovereign citizens in the protests. And these would be the Moorish sovereigns, not the white sovereigns. I think at some point, a lot of groups are going to figure out that they have a common enemy.

Brown: I guess we will maybe see more groups, like white supremacist and black separatist groups, possibly working together, despite their hate for one another.

MacNab: Ironic, is it not? Unfortunately, even though their target would be, for example, the President or Congressmen, it is going to be police officers on the frontline that are going to bear the brunt of this. They are our front line in protecting us from these extremists.

Brown: Ms. MacNab, I would like to thank you so much for coming out and giving us an opportunity to interview you.

MacNab: Thank you for having me.

Outro:

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