

ATF Declares War in Waco

by Sarah Foster

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The day following the firestorm at the Branch Davidian complex, President Clinton issued a warning (or threat?) that people “tempted” to join cults and become involved with the likes of Waco’s David Koresh should be “deterred by the horrible scenes.” Senator Howard Metzenbaum also discovered a lesson: Waco showed the need for tight federal firearms laws.

Did the Senator call for a similar control on firearms by federal agencies such as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), which have each developed a mini-army with all the hellfire of the modern military at their disposal? Are you kidding?

As a libertarian I find these remarks chilling and read other lessons in the fire. For me, the Waco horror was a lesson in how quickly the media and the American public will excuse any action of government, no matter how egregious, against a person or group it thinks is bad enough. Thus, because Koresh was labeled a cult leader it was OK to launch a military-style operation against him and the Branch Davidians, the only reproach being that ATF failed to “do the job right” at the get-go and things got messy.

Which brings us to guns and Senator Metzenbaum’s claim that here was proof positive of the need for their control. But Waco, if anything, proves the opposite. Those scenes should put us on red alert against such a proposal.

We’ve seen such scene 100 times over on our TV screens. We’ve watched what governments do to people they don’t like: in Germany, in China, in Russia. But this time it was our government we watched, folks. The government of, by and for the people of the United States. That wasn’t Tiananmen Square or the Warsaw Ghetto on our TV screens. It was Texas, and those were real American tanks and soldiers moving against real American citizens, none of whom had been formally charged with either a state or federal crime.

Waco showed our government in action: a government whose agents now think there’s nothing wrong in conducting “no-knock” raids and full-scale military operations against civilians, a government whose agents use tear gas against women and children, a government whose agents have so little compassion they mock the sufferings of their victims.

That’s right. TV reporters in Dallas, who were first on the scene as the flames subsided, allegedly saw the commandos giving each other the “high five” sign and heard them joke about how much they enjoyed--enjoyed--their “Texas barbecue.”

The fact that a large number of ordinary people possess effective weapons and could muster significant firepower is apparently the only thing keeping our government in check. Think about it. If our government behaves as it does while we still have some gun rights, have you any doubts how it would behave if we have none?

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