In the introduction to *Armed for Life*, the author outlines the challenges of studying the *Army of God*, a loosely organized, amorphous anti-abortion terrorist group in the United States) by comparing the task to holding “a moonbeam in your hand” (p. xi). Indeed, the *Army of God* is difficult to grasp because it is a distinctly amorphous organization, held together by a single idea: abortion is murder and therefore it must be countered by any means necessary. Paying scholarly attention to the *Army* is important for two reasons. First, the organization has proven to be extremely harmful: it has taken numerous lives, destroyed health care facilities, and threatened the safety and freedom of both those accessing and those providing reproductive healthcare. Second, the loose structure characterizing the *Army* reflects a burgeoning trend in terrorism – ‘leaderless resistance’.

The first chapter of *Armed for Life* provides a brief historical overview of the practice of, and attitudes to, abortion - ranging from ancient Greece to present-day United States. The second chapter describes the Army’s split from the mainstream pro-life movement and, with it, its turn towards violence. The third chapter, focuses on some of the rationales and justifications professed by members of the *Army of God* for engaging in murder. In the fourth chapter, Jefferis examines the structure (or rather: lack thereof) of the *Army*. The fifth and final chapter discusses political and legal responses to the *Army* and its tactics.

Until the 1970s, abortion was illegal in the United States. However, in the seminal 1973 court *Roe v. Wade* case, abortion was legalized under certain conditions. The decision was highly controversial; within a year it provoked the rise of a sizeable pro-life movement across the country. Yet soon this movement struggled with its limited repertoire to achieve some form of success. Discouraged by their slow progress, some members of the pro-life movement began adopting more extreme measures, engaging in vandalism, property destruction and even the bombing of clinics. With time, such actions escalated, culminating in the murder of doctors and clinics’ staff who were held responsible for conducting abortions.

One of the main questions posed in the book is how a pro-life group legitimizes the use of violence to achieve its goals. According to Jefferis, the most common rationalizations offered are biblical/religious, moral, legal (i.e. self-defense), utilitarian and finally, what the author calls, ‘personal justification’. Membership in the *Army* is mainly based on support for certain beliefs about abortion and the willingness to use violence, rather than on any form of official registration or training and indoctrination. Unlike more traditional terrorist organizations, the *Army* has no cells, hierarchies or collaboration in planning attacks; the only chain of command is between individual “soldiers” and the group’s “general” (God). However, that is not to say it is completely without any form of organization; members share loose personal ties, tap into a vast body of online literature and technical advice, and organize an annual banquet to honor those who are serving prison time for anti-abortion violence. The author posits that the group’s unique organizational characteristics challenge governments to constantly re-consider counterterrorist tactics. Despite important progress in policies condemning anti-abortion violence, tensions
remain between free speech and the right to be protected from intimidation. In addition, given the lack of clear institutional standards, governmental policies are often dictated by political party affiliation and ideology.

Though Jefferis is thorough in accounting for variations in responses to the Army’s actions, her analysis lacks a more detailed discussion of the role of culture and cultural bias. She fails to examine how the ethnic, racial and religious profile of a group such as the Army of God influences its likelihood of being considered a terrorist organization. Would the Army receive such lax and inconsistent prosecution if its members identified with Islam instead of Christianity? By ignoring the impact of cultural bias in (not) prosecuting certain members of the Army of God, Jefferis overlooks an important obstacle to the dismantling of the Army and to bringing an end to its violence.

In her conclusion, Jennifer Jefferis acknowledges that until we can “pin down” the Army it will “keep coming back” (p. 144). However, she argues that a better understanding of how it came into being and how it functions will also contribute to a better understanding of other single issue groups. Indeed, although the book does not offer concrete solutions, Armed for Life provides the reader with an engaging, detailed and rich understanding of this controversial organization. It is especially helpful for those who wish to understand the ideology, historical background and political context under which the Army of God was formed.

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