

Questions remain as to ties between police, border militias and Trump campaign in southwest US

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27 October 2020

In the aftermath of a plot by far-right militia men to kidnap and kill the governors of Michigan and Virginia, more details are emerging of the network of right-wing groups along the US-Mexico border in the states of Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. Arizona and Texas are battleground states in this year's election between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Since Trump has appealed to militia and fascist supporters to help carry out his plot to remain in power no matter the outcome of the popular vote, it is necessary to take a closer look at the presence and political connections of militias in the American Southwest.

A September 29 FBI report from the Dallas, Texas bureau noted that leading up to the November election, right-wing extremist groups including "boogaloo adherents" and "militia violent extremists" are increasing "violent and criminal activity" in the Southwest.

Many of these militia groups have ties to the police. At the center of the right-wing network in the border states is Joe Arpaio, the fascist sheriff who set up a self-proclaimed "concentration camp" for immigrants along the border and was pardoned by Donald Trump in 2017 after being convicted of contempt of court for refusing to stop his department from racially profiling Latinos. Trump has called Arpaio a "patriot." Arpaio has spoken at numerous campaign rallies for Trump and has been busy building support for Trump's presidency across the region.

Arpaio has close ties to various right-wing groups, including the Three Percenters and Oath Keepers. The land in Wisconsin where the Wolverine Watchmen trained for their plot to kill Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer was owned by a member of both the

Three Percenters and the Oath Keepers, while conspiracy leader Adam Fox was reportedly a leader of Michigan's Three Percenters.

The Oath Keepers are closely connected to the fascist Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association (CSPOA), which was founded by Arpaio and former Graham County, Arizona Sheriff Richard Mack, who is also a founding board member of the Oath Keepers.

In 2006 Mack ran for US Senate as a libertarian. In 2012 and 2018, Mack ran in and lost Republican primaries for congress in Texas and Arizona, respectively.

Mack is also a longtime member and leader in the National Rifle Association, and has been featured multiple times on Alex Jones' show Prison Planet. He also was a speaker at the far-right Red Pill Expo. Oath Keepers' founder Stewart Rhodes was one of the speakers at the 2019 CSPOA conference.

The CSPOA signed a joint letter to sheriffs around the country as part of the Liberty Group Coalition, which is comprised of the Gun Owners of America, Oath Keepers, the John Birch Society, Tenth Amendment Center and other organizations. The letter was prompted by a proposed gun control bill by the Democrats, and was a page-long tirade centered around the Second Amendment being taken away by Americans' "succumbing" to the temptation to "fundamentally change America into another socialistic regime."

Arpaio is directly connected to these individuals.

Arpaio's connections to the Trump administration are well-established. In March 2018, Arpaio held a pro-Trump rally in Prescott, Arizona, where the Oath Keepers showed up to serve as a security detail. Arpaio

was shouted down from the stage by students decrying his ties to the Oath Keepers.

In the last six months, the CSPOA has actively sought to build a network of police who refuse to enforce governors' orders on mask mandates and other anti-coronavirus measures. Mack was a speaker at an anti-mask rally in Scottsdale, Arizona, in June where he declared the CSPOA's opposition to masks. He said, "We do have a pandemic in America and in Arizona ... But it's not the coronavirus. The pandemic is one of universal corruption, the pandemic is one of the destruction of our Constitution."

In July, Mack also held a pay-per-view virtual seminar coaching attendees on how police can oppose mask mandates, advertising on the CSPOA website: "Are You Ready To Create A Liberty Movement With Us?" and "End Tyranny In Your City & State ... Help Restore Liberty Across The Country ... End Mandated Masks ... End Mandated Vaccines." Mack's references to "Ending Tyranny" closely mirror statements of the Michigan conspirators against Governor Whitmer.

The CSPOA is particularly strong in the Southwest. Almost all of New Mexico's sheriffs have aligned themselves with the CSPOA. From 2013 to 2019, 29 of New Mexico's 33 sheriff departments participated in CSPOA activities and many have also attended meetings with other extreme right-wing groups like the John Birch Society and the Oath Keepers.

The Oath Keepers, to whom Arpaio is associated, has encouraged its members to donate to the Arizona Border Recon (AZBR) and has featured interviews with leaders of militia groups such as AZBR and others. AZBR patrols the US-Mexico border and terrorizes immigrants.

AZBR was founded by Tim Foley in 2011. Foley, in an interview with *USA Today*, stated that a majority of volunteers have experience in military and law enforcement. AZBR's website states under the "Who We Are" section that they "provide intelligence and security services in partnership with the United States Customs and Border Patrol."

Foley was one of the featured speakers at the "Trump Unity Rally" in 2018 which also featured Arpaio. The Oath Keepers were one of the two militias that provided security for the rally, the other being the Arizona Liberty Guard (ALG). ALG has also showed up to other Trump rallies such as the "March 4 Trump"

in Phoenix in 2017.

In September 2018 Foley gave a speech outside of the US capitol along with Arpaio, presidential adviser Kellyanne Conway, House Majority Whip Steve Scalise and others in a "Angel Families" anti-immigration event.

The border militias have trained thousands of vigilantes who have the same fundamental outlook as the Michigan plotters. These connections only raise further questions about the ties of far-right groups across the United States.



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