

New “domestic terrorism” charges brought against fascists who plotted to kidnap Michigan Governor Whitmer

Kevin Reed
30 April 2021

A federal grand jury in Michigan returned on Wednesday a superseding indictment that adds charges of conspiracy to “use a weapon of mass destruction” against three defendants and firearms violations against two defendants who plotted to kidnap and execute the governor of Michigan, Democrat Gretchen Whitmer, last fall.

Significantly, the superseding indictment issued by the US District Court for the Western District of Michigan Southern Division and signed by Chief US District Judge Robert J. Jonker states that the plot was an act of “domestic terrorism.” Generally speaking, a superseding indictment can be pursued by a prosecutor—or a grand jury—when new evidence has been found and the scope of the charges has expanded.

The new indictment adds Count 2 and states that Adam Fox, 40, of Wyoming, Michigan; Barry Croft Jr., 45, of Bear, Delaware; and Daniel Joseph Harris, 23, of Lake Orion, Michigan “intended to use... destructive devices to facilitate their plot to kidnap the Governor, by harming and hindering the Governor’s security detail and any responding law enforcement officers.” It also says that the three “traveled in interstate commerce and used a facility of interstate commerce in furtherance of the offense.”

The indictment adds that Croft and Harris “knowingly possessed a firearm” that was “not registered to them” and that Harris additionally possessed a semiautomatic assault rifle “with a barrel of less than 16 inches in length” that was also not registered to him.

In all, the new indictment contains four counts that incorporate the federal charges brought against the six kidnap plotters last fall. On October 8, 2020, the US Justice Department announced the arrest of the six men who were linked to an organization known as the Wolverine Watchmen. Seven others were also arrested

and face a series of state charges in connection with the plot to kidnap Whitmer from her vacation home and leave her stranded in a boat on Lake Michigan. The plotters are known to have discussed transporting Whitmer to Wisconsin to face “trial” for treason and then execute her.

The original indictment contained important details about how the individual conspirators communicated with each other, where they met, what they discussed and what they were doing to prepare for the planned kidnapping. Among these specifics were: (1) the organization of “field training exercises” that included “combat tactics” such as assaulting motor vehicles using semiautomatic assault rifles and live ammunition; (2) a daytime surveillance of the Governor’s vacation home; (3) a nighttime surveillance of the Governor’s vacation home and a nearby public boat ramp, using two-way radios and a night-vision scope; (4) inspection of the underside of a highway bridge near Whitmer’s vacation home for a place to mount an explosive charge; (5) testing of an improvised explosive device containing shrapnel near human silhouette targets hung by the conspirators to assess its effectiveness; (6) purchase of a Taser-type high-voltage stunning device.

The new indictment adds more details to the facts of the plot including: (1) Daniel Joseph Harris advised through “encrypted internet communications” that he was a Marine Corps infantry veteran who “can make things go boom if you give me what I need” and could use timing detonation cord; (2) Croft and Harris traveled to Wisconsin where they “assembled and attempted to detonate two improvised explosive devices containing shrapnel;” (3) Croft and Harris “successfully detonated an improvised explosive device containing shrapnel near human silhouette targets to assess its effectiveness as an anti-personnel weapon;” (4) Fox and Harris ordered

explosives “from an undercover FBI agent posing as a co-conspirator” and attempted to drive to Ypsilanti, Michigan, to make a good-faith payment towards these explosives.

In a section of the superseding indictment called “Manner and Means,” it is revealed that Fox and Croft are affiliated with the fascist Three Percenters organization. The document then explains the defendants have been charged with “domestic terrorism” because, “they engaged in activities within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States, that involved acts dangerous to human life that were a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; and which were intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.”

As pointed out by *Buzzfeed*, the charge of domestic terrorism signals a shift in how the Justice Department is approaching the case, stating, “Although there are no statutory penalties for domestic terrorism at the federal level, defining the case that way could significantly increase the penalties that defendants... would face if convicted on the other counts.” A press release from the Justice Department states, “Defendants Adam Fox, Barry Croft, Kaleb Franks, Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta each face up to life in prison if convicted of the kidnapping conspiracy. Fox, Croft, and Harris each face up to life in prison if convicted of conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction.”

While the charges and pursuit of life sentences against the plotters in Michigan by the federal government are intensifying, there is a notable effort underway to prevent any connections between individuals and organizations within the US political establishment—not to mention law enforcement and the US military—to the fascist and white supremacist groups and organizations from being exposed to the public. This effort is being led by the Democratic Party and the administration of President Joe Biden who has consistently called for “unity” with his “Republican colleagues” since being sworn into office on January 20.

As with those in the fascist mob who have been criminally charged in connection with the January 6 coup attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 elections, the political, organizational and financial connections between the insurrectionists and the Republican Party and Trump White House are being covered up and buried. Both the assault by armed right-wing extremists on the State Capitol in Lansing, Michigan one year ago—which

was the precursor to the plot to kidnap Whitmer—and the January 6 siege of the US Capitol were coordinated and encouraged by Trump, his advisers and supporters in the US Congress.

In a related development, Jonathan Joshua Munafo, 34, of Albany, New York was arrested and charged with communicating an interstate threat in a court filing on Friday that describes a broader probe involving Munafo and threatening phone calls earlier this year. The complaint states that on the day before the insurrection at the US Capitol, a man who identified himself as “Yankee Patriot” made repeated threatening phone calls to Calhoun County, Michigan emergency dispatch.

FBI Special Agent Richard Trask, a lead investigator in the Whitmer kidnapping case, wrote, “The caller, later identified as Jonathan Munafo, placed approximately 143 calls demanding to speak with a deputy sheriff or sergeant, tying up the emergency line for several hours.”

Munafo told a dispatcher he knew where she lived and disclosed personal information about her mortgage and taxes. Trask wrote in his affidavit, “Munafo told the dispatcher that he would maim her, kill her, and attack her family if she did not put a deputy or sergeant on the line.” FBI analysis of Munafo’s computer showed that he had searched online for Governor Whitmer as well as the location of gun stores in the days leading up to the US Capitol insurrection.

On January 6, FBI investigators traced the phone calls to an internet phone service provider. The phone number led to another provider who gave investigators the subscriber’s username, email address and IP address used at the time of the threatening calls. The addresses all belonged to Munafo, according to Trask.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact