

Nine-hour police standoff with “Moorish” sovereign citizen group closes interstate in Massachusetts

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This past Saturday, Massachusetts state police officers arrested 11 people following a more than nine-hour standoff on Interstate 95 outside the town of Wakefield, just north of Boston.

According to police accounts, the standoff ensued after members of the right-wing sovereign citizens group “Rise of the Moors” refused to identify themselves or provide registration information for the weapons they were openly carrying, which included semi-automatic rifles and pistols.

The incident began around 1:30 a.m. when a Massachusetts state trooper allegedly stopped to provide assistance to two vehicles in the northbound emergency breakdown lane of I-95. According to an account relayed to the *Washington Post* by the Wakefield Police Department, police called for back-up after members of the group refused to identify themselves or provide registration documents for their weapons, claiming they did not recognize state laws and then fled into the nearby woods.

After members of the predominately African American group fled from the police, emergency services issued a “Reverse 911” to residents of Wakefield, Stoneham and Reading, warning them via text messages to shelter in place. Police also shut down multiple lanes of the interstate, which by early Saturday morning was starting to fill with July 4th holiday travelers.

During the extended standoff, police deployed armored vehicles and SWAT teams to trap the group. By 11:00 a.m. all members of the group had surrendered and state police claimed to have recovered three AR-15 rifles, two pistols, a bolt-action rifle, a shotgun and a short-barrel rifle.

Despite the extraordinary and potentially violent nature of the event, involving a protracted armed standoff and

orders for thousands of local residents to remain in their homes, the national news media, which gave the incident extensive coverage Saturday morning, largely dropped it soon after.

In a bizarre video posted on the group’s YouTube channel during the standoff, the leader of “Rise of the Moors,” a former US Marine, Jamhal Tavon Sanders Latimer, 29, of Providence, Rhode Island, described his location as “North America, Morocco” and claimed to be “peaceful.” Throughout the encounter, Latimer had an AR-15 slung over his shoulder and wore body armor with a patch featuring a revolver that read: “If you can read this you are within range.”

In a separate recording, Latimer claimed the group was simply “passing through” and wanted to avoid the “public” by refueling on the side of the road with gas cans instead of at a gas station. Latimer claimed that “his men,” all of whom were wearing combat fatigues, were traveling to Maine to “train” on “private land.”

According to the Middlesex District Attorney’s Office, the arrested individuals have been charged with multiple gun-related offenses that could carry prison sentences of up to 10 years. The charges include unlawful possession of firearms and ammunition, use of body armor in commission of a crime, possession of a high capacity magazine, improper storage of firearms in a vehicle, and conspiracy to commit a crime. Additionally, three members of the group, including a 17-year male juvenile, have been charged with furnishing a false name to police.

In addition to the leader of the group, Latimer, most of the other arrested members have been identified, including: Robert Rodriguez, 21, Wilfredo Hernández, 23, Alban El Curraugh, 27 and Lamar Dow, 34, all from the Bronx, New York.

Other members of the group who have been charged

include Aaron Lamont Johnson, 29, of Detroit, Michigan; Quinn Cumberlander, 40, of Pawtucket, Rhode Island; and Conrad Pierre, 29, of Baldwin, New York. Two “John Does” and the 17-year-old juvenile have yet to be identified but are still facing charges. The 17-year-old has been released to parental custody while the remainder of the arrested men are being held following a contentious hearing on Tuesday at the Cambridge District Court.

Tuesday’s court hearing, which was conducted in person and via Zoom, was frequently interrupted by supporters of the Rise of the Moors, one of whom decried the hearing as an example of “high treason,” according to Bob Ward of “Boston 25 News.”

Nearly all of the defendants chose to represent themselves. The first to appear before the judge was Cumberlander, whom prosecutors allege was one of the first members to exit the vehicle with a weapon. Cumberlander refused to accept a court-appointed attorney and told the judge he was a “foreign national” and part of a “well-regulated militia.”

One member of the group, who appeared before the court as “John Doe #1,” also claimed to be a “national” and accused the judge of “breaking a treaty between your county and mine.”

In 2016, Mark Pitcavage of the Anti-Defamation League’s Center on Extremism wrote that Moorish sovereign groups believe in the “notion that African Americans had special rights because of a 1780s treaty with Morocco, as well as the belief African Americans were descended from African ‘Moors’—and often as well the belief African Americans were also a people indigenous to the Americas.”

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC): “The Moorish sovereign citizen movement is a collection of independent organizations and lone individuals that emerged in the early 1990s as an offshoot of the anti-government sovereign citizens movement, which believes that individual citizens hold sovereignty over, and are independent of, the authority of federal and state governments.”

Rise of the Moors was listed as one of 25 active anti-government sovereign citizen groups by the SPLC in 2020. Like most Moorish sovereign citizen groups, Rise of the Moors, traces its lineage to the 1913 founding of the Moorish Science Temple of America by Noble Drew Ali, otherwise known as Timothy Drew.

The size of the membership of Rise of the Moors is not known. However, a March 26, 2021 video uploaded by YouTube user Shawn Dinero and titled “Moorish

Constitutional Convention,” which featured the hashtag “Rise of the Moors,” showed a meeting with fewer than 30 people in attendance.

In a recent interview with “Boston 25 News,” Margaret Huang, president & CEO of the SPLC said the group claims to “have no obligation to have licenses or to comply with orders.” She continued, “So I imagine that the standoff was a result of the completely different perspective on this situation that those two parties encountered.”

Huang noted that Rise of the Moors “does not have a history of violent activity, but they do have a strong predilection for carrying and for training their supporters in the use of guns and other weaponry.”

Another YouTube video uploaded by Dinero titled “Rise of the Moors” is a rap song that features guns and the same red flag with a green star that members of the group displayed on the interstate during their standoff with police. The video expresses the group’s reactionary perspective, with such illuminating lyrics as “study Moorish science, no need for college,” and, “It’s time to lock and load, leave you with holes the size of dinner plates.”

Rejecting science, the Enlightenment and socialism, the group’s social media accounts feature memes spouting a mix of Islamic religious phrases based on bogus ancestral claims to North America and “get rich quick” schemes.

On its still—as of this writing—operating website, Rise of the Moors seeks to profit by appealing to backward conceptions. It offers for purchase “writs” such as a “Decleration (sic) of Vaccination Refusal,” which for \$5.00 provides a “Declaration of Moorish divine, ecclesiastical and religious right to refuse any and all vaccinations.”



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