

Leader of fascist Oath Keepers arrested on seditious conspiracy in January 6 coup attempt

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In the most serious charges filed so far by the US Department of Justice (DOJ) related to the attempted coup of January 6, on Thursday the DOJ unsealed seditious conspiracy charges against the founder and leader of the fascistic Oath Keeper militia group, Stewart Rhodes.

Rhodes, along with ten of his fascist co-conspirators, are alleged to have organized a wide-ranging plot to storm the Capitol and prevent the electoral college certification of Joe Biden's victory by force. All could face 20-year prison sentences if convicted.

According to his attorney, Jonathon Moseley, FBI agents arrested Rhodes on Thursday in Texas. This is the first time Rhodes, a 56-year-old former US Army paratrooper and Yale-educated lawyer, has been charged for his role in Trump's attempted coup. However, his presence on restricted Capitol grounds, while communicating with Oath Keepers who would later breach the Capitol, has been noted in previous indictments.

Joining Rhodes in being charged for the first time for actions on January 6 was Edward Vallejo, a 63-year-old Phoenix, Arizona Oath Keeper. The other nine Oath Keepers charged with seditious conspiracy were all previously indicted for their actions during the attack: Thomas Caldwell, 67; Joseph Hackett, 51; Kenneth Harrelson, 41; Joshua James, 34; Kelly Meggs, 52; Roberto Minuta, 37; David Moerschel, 44; Brian Ulrich, 44; and Jessica Watkins, 39.

The group of fascists are accused of coordinating their travel across the country in order to enter Washington D.C. "equipped ... with a variety of weapons ... combat and tactical gear ... on or before January 6, 2021," per the indictment.

While prosecutors allege that the group began planning "in late December 2020" via "encrypted and private communications applications," it also notes that on November 5, two days after the election, Rhodes sent a Signal message to several Oath Keepers who would

participate in the storming of the Capitol, under the group name "Leadership intel sharing secured."

In the message, Rhodes allegedly told the group, "We aren't getting through this without a civil war. Too late for that. Prepare you mind, body, spirit." Two days later Rhodes wrote in the same group chat, "[W]e must now do what the people of Serbia did when Milosevic stole their election. Refuse to accept it and march en-mass on the nation's Capitol."

Two days later, on November 9, Rhodes held a national web meeting of the Oath Keepers on the GoToMeeting application where he called on all the group's members to march on the Capitol in support of former president Donald Trump's dictatorial scheme.

"We're going to defend the president, the duly elected president, and we call on him to do what needs to be done to save our country," Rhodes said. "Because if you don't guys, you're going to be in a bloody, bloody civil war, and a bloody—you can call it an insurrection or you can call it a war or fight."

Waiting for direction from their would-be Führer Trump, Rhodes added, "We hope he will give us the order. We want him to declare an insurrection, and to call us up as the militia."

The far-right Oath Keepers, along with the Proud Boys, formed the tip of the fascist spear in Trump's attempt to overthrow the election of Biden and the remnants of bourgeois democracy in the US. In a previous indictment, Meggs, the leader of the Florida chapter of the Oath Keepers, admitted over encrypted messaging to forming an "alliance" with the Proud Boys prior to the attack.

"We have decided to work together and shut this sh*t down," Meggs wrote on December 19.

Comprised of current and former police, military personnel, and reactionaries of all stripes, in the lead-up to January 6, both paramilitary groups participated in and provided "security" for Trump-aligned speakers at "Stop the

Steal” rallies held throughout the country and in Washington D.C. on November 14, December 12, 2020 and January 5, 2021.

The rallies served multiple purposes for Trump: in addition to inciting fascistic violence and propagating Trump’s lies that the election was fraudulent, the rallies also provided an environment for Trump-aligned figures to game-plan their future attack with their lumpen foot soldiers.

Among those who employed the services of the Oath Keepers at the Stop the Steal rallies were longtime Trump political crony Roger Stone and retired Army general Michael Flynn, Trump’s first national security adviser and a public supporter of the QAnon fascist tendency. Both of them have been photographed with Oath Keepers members Minuta and James, the former appearing with Stone in Washington D.C. the morning of January 6.

Alex Jones, the host of the fascistic *InfoWars* program and January 6 participant, has hosted Rhodes multiple times on his show over the years. During Rhodes’ last appearance on the program, less than a week before the attack on the Capitol, Rhodes telegraphed the attack on the Capitol, warning of a “second civil war” and again expressing his hope that Trump would invoke the Insurrection Act.

According to US federal code, to be charged with in a “seditious conspiracy” requires “two or mores persons” to “conspire to overthrow, put down, or to destroy by force the Government of the United States ... or to oppose by force the authority thereof.” In order for someone to be found guilty of seditious conspiracy, the plot does not need to be successful, the government only has to prove that the criminal scheme was planned in advance.

The indictment details several aspects of the plot, including the group organizing into specific teams tasked with different aspects of the plot, from breaching the Capitol to “QRFs” or “quick reaction forces,” stationed outside the Capitol with military grade weaponry. Prosecutors claim that prior to January 6, Rhodes spent roughly \$15,500 on weapons, sights, scopes and armor plates. Beginning on January 10, Rhodes spent an additional \$17,500 on “firearm parts, magazines, ammunition, holsters, rifle scopes, bipods and other related items.

Unlike the hundreds of low-level Trump supporters and white supremacists who have been charged so far, and presented as proof by those on the far-right and pseudo-left that there was no organized effort to overthrow the election of Biden, the Oath Keepers group led by Rhodes carried out its mission with deadly serious purpose and intent. While two groups breached the Capitol, Caldwell and Vallejo stayed outside the Capitol with Rhodes, coordinating movements and possible weapon deployments.

Prosecutors allege that at 2:30 p.m., Kelly, Meggs,

Harrelson, Watkins, Hackett and Moerschel, along with other Oath Keepers, moved in a military stack formation up the Capitol steps, breaching the doors at 2:38 p.m. Once inside the Capitol, the “stack” split up, with half moving towards the Senate Chamber, where, according to the indictment, they were “forcibly repelled” by police, causing them to regroup and leave the building.

The other half of the stack “headed toward the House of Representatives, in search of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. They did not find Speaker Pelosi and ultimately left the building.”

A different group of Oath Keepers, comprised of Minuta, James and Ulrich, commandeered golf carts at 2:30 p.m. and drove to the Capitol. In a Facebook livestream, Minuta said, “Patriots are storming the Capitol building; there’s violence against patriots by the D.C. Police; so we’re en route in a grand theft auto golf cart to the Capitol building right now ... it’s going down, guys; it’s literally going down right now Patriots storming the Capitol building ... fucking war in the streets right now ... word is they got in the building ... let’s go.”

Prosecutors allege this second group eventually breached the Capitol rotunda, armed with chemical spray, and engaged with police. Rhodes messaged both groups at 3:30 p.m. via the Signal leadership chat, and commanded them to “come [t]o US capitol on the Supreme Court side. Come to Capitol on the NE corner,” which Meggs, Harrelson, Watkins, James, Minuta, Hackett, Moershel, Ulrich “and others” did, according to the indictment.

After the attack, the government claims Rhodes, James, Vallejo and others met at a restaurant in Vienna, Virginia to “celebrate their attack ... and discuss next steps.” In the weeks that followed, the group continued to communicate in the same group chat they used to plan the attack.

In the chat Rhodes allegedly wrote: “Patriots entering their own Capitol to send a message to the traitors is NOTHING compared to what’s coming.” As the January 20 inauguration of Biden drew near, Rhodes instructed the group to organize local militias in opposition to the Biden government.



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