

Stewart Rhodes and Oath Keepers charged with seditious conspiracy

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The arrest of fascist Oath Keeper leader Stewart Rhodes and 10 other Oath Keepers on charges of seditious conspiracy explodes the claim that January 6 was merely an unruly protest and not a conspiracy by Trump to overturn the 2020 election result and establish a dictatorship.

The facts in the indictment filed by federal prosecutors Thursday make clear the Oath Keepers formed a critical component of the operational plans to halt the constitutional certification of the electoral college vote by violence. These plans came breathtakingly close to succeeding.

“After the Presidential election,” the indictment reads, “Elmer Stewart Rhodes III conspired with his co-defendants... to oppose by force the lawful transfer of presidential power.” The Oath Keepers “coordinated travel across the country to enter Washington D.C., equipped themselves with a variety of weapons, donned combat and tactical gear,” and “planned to use the firearms in support of their plot to stop the lawful transfer of presidential power.”

The indictment notes that Rhodes established “Quick Response Teams” that were deployed throughout the city on January 6. They set up a base and a weapons depot at a hotel in Arlington, Virginia and prepared for what Rhodes called “a bloody and desperate fight.” Members of the QRTs prepared for January 6 by engaging in “unconventional warfare” training and discussed the possibility that their actions would involve “armed conflict” and “guerrilla war.”

At roughly 2:30 p.m. on January 6, Oath Keeper forces deployed in SWAT-style “stack” formation and marched up the Capitol steps. The mob breached the Capitol at 2:38 after a brief confrontation with police.

Once inside, the “stack” split into two groups. One group attempted to gain entrance to the Senate Chamber and the other “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.” Another QRT entered the Capitol from the opposite side about a half hour later. Other forces “remained stationed just outside of the city in QRF teams. The QRF teams were prepared to rapidly transport firearms and other weapons

into Washington D.C. in support of operations aimed at using force to stop the lawful transfer of presidential power.”

The aim of the Oath Keepers was clearly to kidnap and detain or kill members of Congress. In the days before January 6, Rhodes bought more than \$20,000 worth of guns and equipment for the QRTs. In December, 2020, he purchased a weapons sight and night-vision goggles for \$7,000 for use on January 6 and at some point in early January he spent another \$15,000 on guns, ammunition, sights and a bipod. These are items used by assassination and kidnapping squads.

The arrest of Rhodes and 10 other Oath Keepers on “seditious conspiracy” charges begs the question: from whom were the QRTs taking orders? Trump himself ordered his fascist paramilitary supporters to “stand back and stand by” in a September debate with Biden, and the indictment makes clear that Rhodes and his co-conspirators repeatedly acted with the understanding they were following Trump’s direction.

As significant as the arrests are, the Oath Keepers formed merely one component of the conspiracy that played out on January 6. Within the state, a network of powerful players helped ensure that the QRTs and the protestors would have an opportunity to surround Congress and capture senators and representatives. In the aftermath of the November 3 election, Trump adviser Stephen Bannon set up a “command center” at the Willard Hotel, where Michael Flynn, Roger Stone, Rudy Giuliani, Trump lawyer John Eastman and other conspirators met to coordinate Trump’s plan to remain in power.

On January 6, almost 150 Republican members of Congress voted against certifying the election results, triggering debate rules that ensured the constitutional obligation would take hours to fulfill. The day before, Eastman and Trump attorney Sidney Powell filed a last-minute request that the Supreme Court pause the certification, a request that remained pending as January 6 unfolded.

That afternoon, Trump encouraged his mob to march on the Capitol building as the electoral count took place. Capitol police offered no serious resistance to the demonstrators and the military stood by for 199 minutes, allowing the attack to take place. Recent reports show that the Department of Homeland Security systematically downplayed credible threats and left the Capitol building undefended. Trump calculated that the Democratic Party would do nothing to appeal to the population to oppose the coup because the Democrats were more terrified of the social opposition that would erupt from below if the population knew the danger of what was taking place.

The plot failed not because of any action taken by the state institutions or the Democrats, but because of tactical problems and random chance. Rhodes' QRTs and groups of angry demonstrators came within minutes or even seconds of capturing congresspersons. Had they succeeded, there is no question that the Democrats would have negotiated their release through some settlement allowing Trump to stay in power.

The indictment makes clear that Rhodes and his QRTs were not acting alone. Rhodes has high level connections and was a credentialed guest at last year's Republican Conservative Political Action Conference, and it is already known that two of the other Oath Keeper arrestees are former bodyguards for Trump confidant and Willard Hotel attendee Roger Stone. The facts made public in the indictment are just the tip of the iceberg.

The Biden administration has still not taken serious action against the main conspirators who are at-large and actively planning their next attempts to seize power.

Chief among them is Donald Trump, who will deliver a speech at a rally in Florence, Arizona on Saturday and is expected to celebrate the one-year anniversary of January 6. According to advisers, Trump will continue to claim the election was stolen and that January 6 was a patriotic protest against election fraud. Advisers say the Florence rally marks the beginning of Trump's midterm election campaign and that he will be giving rallies across the country from now until November.

Many of those involved in leading the coup will be present at Saturday's rally. My Pillow CEO Mike Lindell, who urged Trump to impose martial law last year, is a featured guest, as are Congressmen Paul Gosar and Andy Biggs, both involved in the fascist "Stop the Steal" campaign, as well as Arizona state legislator Mike Finchem, who is a member of the Oath Keepers. Arizona Republican Party Chair Kelli Ward, who supported the coup attempt and previously urged Republican voters to "fight to the death" for Trump, will also speak.

With this line-up, Trump is sending a clear message: The

conspiracy to seize power did not end with the failure of January 6. Instead, Trump and his co-plotters hope to mythologize January 6 as a new beginning. Meanwhile, the Republican Party and Trump adviser Steven Miller are engaged in a systematic effort to restrict the right to vote to better prepare for future election theft.

A January 12 poll by Quinnipiac stated that a significant majority of the country believes it is likely that another January 6 is currently being planned.

The danger of dictatorship remains. It is urgent that the working class be made aware of what took place on January 6 so that it can mobilize its tremendous social force to stop Trump's plots.

Under these conditions, the Democrats appeal to their Republican "colleagues" for "bipartisanship," while *Jacobin* editor and prominent Democratic Socialists of America member Bhaskar Sunkara offers his services to help the Democrats dull workers' senses by presenting January 6 as "exaggerated" and "not a coup."

In a recent article in the *Guardian*, Sunkara wrote that January 6 showed that the ruling class is "far from ready to openly abandon liberal democratic norms," and attacked left criticism of the Democrats as helping "reactionary forces to become even more aggressive."

From far-right to pseudo-left, the entire political establishment lies to workers in order to minimize the danger of dictatorship, and thereby facilitates Trump's plots. But another process is taking place in the working class.

Across the world, strikes and social protests are developing against the deadly return-to-work policy of the ruling elite, as well as against low wages and the impact of inflation. Such important initial struggles must be linked to the fight for the defense of democratic rights and to a fight against the entire capitalist system. For this to happen, the working class must become aware of both the true danger of dictatorship and its revolutionary power to stop it.



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