

Reports say U.S. Capitol rioters included trained ex-military and police

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Experts in homegrown extremism have warned about efforts by white supremacist groups to recruit people with military training. (Photo: Ted S Warren / AP)

Washington, January 15 (RHC)-- A review by The Associated Press news agency of public records, social media posts and videos shows at least 21 current or former members of U.S. military or law enforcement have been identified as being at or near the U.S. Capitol at the time of the riot, with more than a dozen others under investigation, but not yet named.

Experts in homegrown extremism have warned for years about efforts by far-right groups and white supremacist groups to radicalise and recruit people with military and law enforcement training.

As President Donald Trump's supporters massed outside the US Capitol last week and sang the national anthem, a line of men wearing olive-drab helmets and body armour trudged purposefully up the marble stairs in a single-file line, each man holding the jacket collar of the one ahead.

The formation, known as "Ranger File," is a standard operating procedure for a combat team that is "stacking up" to breach a building -- instantly recognizable to any U.S. soldier or Marine who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was a chilling sign that many at the vanguard of the mob that stormed the seat of American democracy either had military training or were trained by those who did.

In many cases, those who stormed the Capitol appeared to employ the tactics, body armour and technology such as two-way radio headsets that were similar to those of the very police they were confronting.

Michael German, a former FBI agent and fellow with the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University, told reporters: "These people have training and capabilities that far exceed what any foreign terrorist group can do. Foreign terrorist groups don't have any members who have badges."

Among the most prominent to emerge is a retired air force lieutenant colonel and decorated combat veteran from Texas who was arrested after he was photographed wearing a helmet and body armour on the floor of the Senate, holding a pair of zip-tie handcuffs. Retired Lieutenant Colonel Larry Rendall Brock Jr of Texas was released to home confinement on Thursday after a prosecutor alleged the former fighter pilot planned to take hostages.

Adam Newbold, a retired Navy SEAL from Lisbon Ohio, whose more than 20-year military career includes multiple combat awards for valour, said in a January 5 Facebook video: "We are just very prepared, very capable, and very skilled patriots ready for a fight." He later posted a since-deleted follow-up video after the riot saying he was "proud" of the assault.

Two police officers from a small Virginia town, both of them former infantrymen, were arrested by the FBI after posting a selfie of themselves inside the Capitol, one flashing his middle finger at the camera.

While the Pentagon declined to provide an estimate for how many other active-duty military personnel are under investigation, the top military leaders are concerned enough in advance of President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration that they issued a highly unusual warning to all service members this week that the right to free speech gives no one the right to commit violence.

The chief of the U.S. Capitol Police was forced to resign following the breach and "several" officers have been suspended pending the outcome of investigations into their conduct, including one who posed for a selfie with a rioter and another seen wearing one of the Trump's red "Make America Great Again" caps.

The Oath Keepers, which claim to count thousands of current and former law enforcement officials and military veterans as members, have become fixtures at protests and counterprotests across the country, often heavily armed with semiautomatic carbines and tactical shotguns.

Stewart Rhodes, an army veteran who founded the Oath Keepers in 2009 as a reaction to the presidency of Barack Obama, had been saying for weeks before the Capitol riot that his group was preparing for a

civil war and was “armed, prepared to go in if the president calls us up.”

More than 110 people have been arrested on charges related to the Capitol riot so far, ranging from curfew violations to serious federal felonies related to theft and weapons possession.

The FBI is warning of the potential for more bloodshed. In an internal bulletin issued in recent days, the bureau warned of plans for armed protests at all 50 state capitals and in Washington, DC in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, police departments in important cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Houston and Philadelphia announced they were investigating whether members of their agencies participated in the Capitol riot. The Philadelphia area’s transit authority is also investigating whether seven of its police officers who attended Trump’s rally in Washington, DC broke any laws.

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