

Antifa planned anti-government insurgency for months, law enforcement official says

By [Bill Gertz](#) - *The Washington Times* - Wednesday, June 3, 2020

Activists of the far-left [Antifa](#) movement began planning to foment a nationwide anti-government insurgency as early as November as the U.S. presidential campaign season kicked off in earnest, according to a law enforcement official with access to intelligence behind the shadowy group.

The radical movement has emerged as a key focus for investigators in the wake of violent protests and looting across the country after the death of [George Floyd](#) in police custody in [Minneapolis](#), according to U.S. law enforcement officials and private security experts.

The law enforcement official would not speak on the record about [Antifa](#)'s plans as the election season heats up, but longtime analysts of the group say such a move would be entirely in character.

"[Antifa](#)'s actions represent a hard break with the long tradition of a peaceful political process in the United States," said former [National Security Council](#) staff member [Rich Higgins](#). "Their Marxist ideology seeks not only to influence elections in the short term but to destroy the use of elections as the determining factor in political legitimacy."

Added Joe Myers, a former Defense Intelligence Agency official and counterinsurgency expert, "President [Trump](#)'s election and revitalization of America are a threat to [Antifa](#)'s nihilist goals. They are fomenting this violence to create havoc, despair and to target the [Trump](#) campaign for defeat in 2020."

More generally, senior Trump administration officials and private analysts are warning that the radicals have rushed to exploit recent anti-police protests to set into motion a program of widespread civil unrest, a program that involves using the protests for looting and burning inner cities with the help of criminals and street gangs.

Far from a centrally organized movement, [Antifa](#) is a shadowy "anti-fascist" political front of loosely organized, quasi-underground activists known for wearing black-clad outfits and masks who see destructive street violence as a political tool.

In recent days, the group interspersed its operatives among protests set off by the police killing of a handcuffed Mr. [Floyd](#).

Mr. [Trump](#) has singled out [Antifa](#) for the violent protests. The president said Monday that “in recent days, our nation has been gripped by professional anarchists, violent mobs, arsonists, looters, criminals, rioters, [Antifa](#) and others.”

White House National Security Adviser Robert O’Brien said U.S. officials are pressing for more intelligence on the group’s activities in light of the events of recent days.

“The president and the attorney general want to know from [[FBI](#)] Director [Christopher] Wray what the [FBI](#) has been doing to track and dismantle and surveil and prosecute [Antifa](#),” Mr. O’Brien said. “And if that hasn’t been happening, we want to know what the plan is going forward.”

Mr. Myers argued that [Antifa](#) clearly meets the criteria for being labeled a terrorist and insurgent movement.

“It is employing organized violence for political ends: destruction of the constitutional order,” he said.

‘Direct action’

What makes the shadowy group unique is its willingness to use of violence, what [Antifa](#) organizers and sympathizers call “direct” action in support of the anarchist and Marxist-Leninist agenda. That often involves setting fires, looting, throwing bricks and bottles at police, and in one case the apparent use of a milkshake laced with quick-dry cement in attacking an opponent in the face.

[Antifa](#) initially was focused in West Coast cities such as Portland, Oregon, and Berkeley, California. [Antifa](#) supporters later took part in demonstrations during the inauguration of Mr. [Trump](#) in January 2017.

However, security officials said the coordinated, national-level riots inspired by [Antifa](#) in recent days are unprecedented.

In New York, a senior police official provided the first details of how radical anarchists like those with [Antifa](#) came from outside the city and intentionally incited protesters to violence.

John Miller, deputy police commissioner for intelligence and counterterrorism, told NBC New York that the radicals’ operations included organized scouts, medical teams and an arsenal of rocks, bottles and accelerants.

The material was used by hard-core activists interspersed among the protesters who would break away from larger demonstrations to commit acts of violence and vandalism.

Mr. Miller, who did not mention [Antifa](#) by name, said he has high confidence in intelligence assessment of the activities. They included strong indicators that the violent protesters had made preparations. [Antifa](#) also used encrypted communications as part of the planning.

“Before the protests began, organizers of certain anarchist groups set out to raise bail money, and people who would be responsible to be raising bail money, they set out to recruit medics and medical teams with gear to deploy in anticipation of violent interactions with police,” Mr. Miller said.

“They prepared to commit property damage and directed people who were following them that this should be done selectively and only in wealthier areas or at high-end stores run by corporate entities,” he added.

A New York City police spokeswoman confirmed Mr. Miller’s information and said the operations of the rioters included a complex network of scouts on bicycles who would move ahead of demonstrators and identify locations with minimal police presence. At those locations, extremists were able to easily vandalize or burn vehicles using Molotov cocktails.

[Antifa](#)’s leftist agenda calls for supporting so-called social justice movements. Among the liberal-left causes espoused by the group are issues of racism and police misconduct, support for Muslim minorities and backing the transgender rights movement.

Attorney General William P. Barr said peaceful and legitimate protests against Mr. [Floyd](#)’s death were “hijacked by violent radical elements.” He singled out [Antifa](#) for special criticism.

“Groups of outside radicals and agitators are exploiting the situation to pursue their own separate, violent and extremist agenda,” Mr. Barr said on Sunday.

[FBI](#) counterterrorism officials have been monitoring [Antifa](#) and similar violent groups for years. In a bid to obscure its actions, [Antifa](#) has begun using cover names such as Black Lives Matter, Smash Racism, Abolish ICE and others.

Communist roots

The name [Antifa](#) is derived from the Moscow-based Communist International that in 1933 directed the Soviet-led Communist Party USA to form the American League Against War and Fascism. That group was patterned after Germany’s Antifascist Action — or [Antifa](#) — formed in 1932.

CPUSA leader Manning Johnson testified to Congress in 1953 that the goal of the front group was never the abolishment of fascism, but rather “the subversion and subsequent overthrow of the United States.”

The [National Security Council](#)’s Mr. O’Brien described [Antifa](#) foot soldiers as “militant radicals who come into our cities and cross state lines.”

“They’re organized and use Molotov cocktails and fireworks and gas to burn down our cities, especially businesses in minority neighborhoods. It’s got to be stopped,” he said.

Mr. [Higgins](#), the former [NSC](#) staffer, sees [Antifa](#) as a significant tool of leftist and communist political warfare.

“[Antifa](#)’s goal is nothing less than fomenting revolution, civil war and silencing America’s anti-communists,” said Mr. [Higgins](#), a former Pentagon irregular warfare expert. “Their labeling of [Trump](#) supporters and patriots as Nazis and racists is standard fare for left-wing communist groups.”

The ideology of [Antifa](#) is at its center Marxism-Leninism, he said.

“[Antifa](#) is currently functioning as the command and control of the riots, which are themselves the overt utilization of targeted violence against targets such as stores — capitalism; monuments — history; and churches — God,” he said.

Until the riots, the [FBI](#) paid little attention to left-wing radical groups and other subversive organizations because of the overwhelming focus of people and investigative resources on the Islamic State and al Qaeda terrorist groups. Social media sites such as Facebook also say they have taken down some provocative posts by right-wing groups posing as [Antifa](#) members.

Additionally, the bureau has put a much heavier emphasis on investigating right-wing extremists even though these groups are smaller than those like [Antifa](#), Mr. [Higgins](#) said.

Skepticism

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham, South Carolina Republican, said he is skeptical about the prominence of [Antifa](#)’s role in the recent unrest despite the administration’s concerns.

“We will try to find out how organized this violence is,” Mr. Graham said. “But I am old enough to remember 1968, and [Antifa](#) was not around in 1968, that I know of.”

[Antifa](#) also gets support from some academics. Walter F. Heinecke, a University of Virginia associate professor of education, helped secure permits for counterprotests that included [Antifa](#) and other groups in 2017 against the Unite the Right political rally for white nationalists, although Mr. Heinecke asserted that he did not knowingly back the anarchist group’s participation.

Asked whether he supports the movement, Mr. Heinecke said, “I am against fascism, so if [Antifa](#) means against fascism, then generally, yes.”

Mr. Heinecke emphasized that he is “not technically a member of an [Antifa](#) organizing group, and I don’t speak for any [Antifa](#) organization.”

“I like to think all Americans are against fascism, and if so they are anti-fascists,” he said.

Mr. Heinecke said Mr. [Trump](#) and Mr. Barr have made no mention of white nationalists taking action against a black church.

“We don’t hear the equivalent cries from [Trump](#) and Barr about extreme right-wing agitators attempting to turn this into a race war,” he said.

“They are opportunistically looking for the [Antifa](#) as boogeyman to deflect the real issue: There is an insurrection going on in this country against the racist culture and structure.”

Harvard Divinity School Professor Cornel R. West has praised [Antifa](#) for protecting him and other protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017.

[Antifa](#) and its supporters call its operating methods direct action.

Mark Bray, author of “[Antifa](#): The Anti-Fascist Handbook,” argues that “militant anti-fascism” is a reasonable response to what he sees as the rise of right-wing politics.

“It is an unabashedly partisan call to arms that aims to equip a new generation of anti-fascists with the history and theory necessary to defeat the resurgent Far Right,” Mr. Bray said.

Andy Ngo, a journalist who was beaten by [Antifa](#) activists last year, has closely monitored the activities of the group. He recently wrote that the riots around the country are “glimmers of the full insurrection the far left has been working toward for decades.”

Mobilization and disinformation

The death of Mr. [Floyd](#) in [Minneapolis](#) was a pretext for launching the [Antifa](#) insurgency, he said. “In a matter of hours after the video of [Floyd](#) began circulating the internet, militant [Antifa](#) cells across the country mobilized to Minnesota to aid Black Lives Matter rioters,” he said.

Mr. Ngo said [Antifa](#) supporters have spread disinformation that it is white supremacists and nationalists who are to blame for the rioting. So far, no evidence has emerged linking right-wing extremists to the violence.

[Antifa](#) has been operating relatively unimpeded by law enforcement in recent years despite its use of violence, and many analysts credit the movement’s support and sympathy from the liberal left of American political and media establishment.

“One reason is that so many Democrat leaders have children and family members who are active participants in the Marxist movement, with many of them being members of [Antifa](#), insofar as one can be a member,” said Mr. [Higgins](#), the former [NSC](#) official.

Jeremiah Ellison, son of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, tweeted his support for [Antifa](#) on Sunday. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio had his daughter arrested in New York

with protesters, and Sen. Tim Kaine's son Woody also was affiliated with [Antifa](#), Mr. [Higgins](#) said.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, California Democrat, condemned [Antifa](#) after its activists sparked riots in Berkeley several years ago.

But in a now-deleted 2018 tweet, Mr. Ellison, then-deputy chairman of the Democratic National Committee, posted a photograph of an [Antifa](#) handbook with the statement that the manual should "strike fear in the heart of @realDonaldTrump."

Asked about the tweet Sunday, Mr. Ellison told reporters that the tweet about [Antifa](#) was meaningless.

"It means nothing. Look, I was at a bookstore, and I saw a book," said Mr. Ellison. "It means nothing."

The [FBI](#), which is in charge of countering domestic security threats posed by foreign intelligence services or domestic terrorists, has largely avoided focusing on [Antifa](#). A search of the [FBI](#) website produces no results for [Antifa](#).

The [FBI](#) investigated three [Antifa](#) activists suspected of beating a Unite the Right protester in Charlottesville three years ago, but no charges were brought.

Kenneth deGraffenreid, who was deputy national counterintelligence executive during the George W. Bush administration, said the [FBI](#) has not been engaged in effective domestic counterintelligence for years.

"The [FBI](#) has not had a meaningful domestic counterintelligence capability for many years," Mr. deGraffenreid said. "They've been distracted or politically corrupted."