



Oath Keepers and Three %ers Part of Growing Anti-Government Movement

The Oath Keepers and Three Percenters, both part of an anti-government extremist movement that has grown since President Obama took office, promote the idea that the federal government is plotting to take away the rights of American citizens and must be resisted. The two groups are apparently trying to make inroads in the U.S. military.

From October 24-25, 2009, the Oath Keepers held their first national conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. About one hundred people reportedly attended the event. At the conference, a member of the group's board claimed that they had 2,000 dues-paying members but it's likely that the group is much smaller.

Formed in March 2009 and led by Stewart Rhodes, a Nevada lawyer, the Oath Keepers encourage members of the military and law enforcement to pledge not to follow certain hypothetical "orders" from the federal government. These "orders," including one "to put American citizens in detention camps," and another "to disarm the American people," echo longstanding conspiracy theories embraced by anti-government extremists, who claim that the U.S. government is creating a police state. The Oath Keepers try to appeal to military and law enforcement personnel by reminding them that they swore an oath to defend the Constitution "from all enemies, foreign and domestic," and suggesting that now is the time to live up to that oath by resisting an allegedly tyrannical government.

The Three Percenters, formed in late 2008, are a loosely organized movement centered around an obscure, and not particularly accurate, Revolutionary War "statistic" that claimed that only 3% of the American population during the Revolutionary War participated as combatants in the war. The group asserts that they are a modern counterpart to that mythical 3% of American Revolutionary-era patriots and also represent the three percent of the population of American gun owners "who will not disarm."

Recently, the Oath Keepers posted a picture to their Web site of what they claim is an active duty soldier in Iraq wearing the group's patch on his arm. In addition to the Oath Keepers' patch, the soldier is wearing patches for the Three Percenters; one patch that reads "three percent" and another with a version of the American flag with the Roman numeral III. At least one supporter has labeled this symbol the group's "battle flag."

Although Rhodes has written that the Oath Keepers patch was not made by the group and was not worn at their urging, he claims the patch as evidence of the spread of the group's message within the active duty military. Oath Keepers plan to put together care packages that include an official Oath Keepers patch and DVD to distribute to "tens of thousands" of active duty troops between November 11 (Veterans Day) and December 15, 2009 (Bill of Rights Day).

It is clear that these anti-government extremist groups are trying both to exploit and to fan the anti-government sentiment that has grown over President Obama's first year in office, as well as to support each other's efforts. Rhodes has written supportively of the Three Percenters, while at least two participants carried the Three Percenter flag at an Oath Keepers event at the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., on September 12, 2009. That event was staged on the same day that an anti-government Tea Party rally in the city attracted tens of thousands of people, the largest to date of the protests held against the government and Obama since he took office.