

July 1, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

Through the course of our work as a civil rights organization, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has recently become aware of a group of antigovernment militias operating out of Pima County, Arizona. These militias have uploaded numerous pictures and videos to social media platforms, showing militia members stopping, interrogating and handing over migrants to Border Patrol agents. SPLC's Intelligence Project has archived over 500 images and close to 80 videos uploaded to the Telegram platform¹, pushing misinformation and highlighting plans by these groups to intercept migrants.

Currently there appears to be a "border coalition," made up of three militia groups, Veterans on Patrol (VOP), AZ Desert Guardians, and United People of America engaging in these activities. The two main groups, (VOP)² led by Michael "Lewis Arthur" Meyer and AZ Desert Guardians³ led by Rebecca Ferland, have a long history of peddling racist far-right narratives that paint all migrants as violent child predators, drug traffickers, and sometimes even "jihadists." These vigilante groups have a history of accosting migrants and, according to the VOP website, on rare occasions, Meyer has even resorted to using "force" to acquire his "intel."⁴

Through the course of our review, it appears the Border Patrol in the area has been aware of the militia presence since at least 2019. In videos shared by militia members, it appears that some Border Patrol agents have embraced the militias and, in one instance in late May, an agent even met with members of VOP and praised their activities before collecting drone footage from the group. Members of the group have not only lied to Border Patrol agents about recording conversations, but also videotaped and published the faces of numerous agents.

¹ Veterans on Patrol Telegram Channel <https://t.me/BORDERWARSAZ>

² Nick Martin and Hatewatch Staff, "Oath Keepers boss Stewart Rhodes Goes all-in on a Conspiracy Theory too Wild for even Alex Jones," Southern Poverty Law Center (June 12, 2018) <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/06/12/oath-keepers-boss-stewart-rhodes-goes-all-conspiracy-theory-too-wild-even-alex-jones>

³ Hampton Stall, "Militia Tourism: Trouble at the Border, a New Round of Infighting and a Fake Identity," MilitiaWatch (March 12, 2019), <https://medium.com/militiawatch/militia-tourism-trouble-at-the-border-a-new-round-of-infighting-and-a-fake-identity-e4ec6d3b8d95>

⁴ "Child Trafficking Phone Contents Unveiled," Veterans on Patrol (February 15, 2021) <https://veteransonpatrol.org/blog/>

According to the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection (ICAP), it is currently illegal to act as a private militia in the state of Arizona, under the Arizona Constitution art. II, § 20, Arizona Revised Statutes § 26-124 and the Arizona Revised Statutes § 26-170.⁵ We are concerned that these groups appear to be violating these state laws.

Based on the accusations that have been hurled at migrants and the fact that some members of these militias travel armed, we also believe the animosity toward migrants has endangered many lives. There is an urgent need to address this threat.

We call on the Department of Homeland Security to investigate this activity as well the relationship between Border Patrol agents and these fringe right-wing extremists.

We would be happy to provide more information in a briefing or with further documentation.

Sincerely,



Margaret Huang
President and CEO

cc: The Honorable Katherine Culliton-González, Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

⁵ Georgetown Law, Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, “Fact Sheet: Unlawful Militias in Arizona” <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/icap/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2020/09/Arizona.pdf>