

Is the Oregon Occupation Being Stage-Managed?

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US and international media have been abuzz in recent days with the ongoing [armed occupation](#) at the headquarters of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. The social media space has been, quite predictably, polarized with many on the far right lionizing the armed occupiers as “patriots” and “heroes” defending a just cause in the name of “liberty.”

Naturally many liberals and assorted leftists have condemned the occupation, pointing out both the relevant legal and historical issues at play here, including the vicious tradition of white militias in the US, the blatant disregard of environmental regulations, and much more that is well beyond the scope of this article.



But what has been missed by seemingly every pundit, left and right, who has chimed in on the Oregon occupation is the unmistakable stench of provocation. Simply put, something is off about this whole story, and it struck me from the first moment I read about what was happening, who was involved, and who wasn't involved. Specifically, there are indications that this entire fiasco has been manufactured by either government agencies themselves or some other private forces for any number of reasons.

If this sounds like “conspiracy theory” to you, it should; I am here **theorizing** about a

potential **conspiracy**[studio audience gasps]. While the media, academia, and other assorted handmaidens of the ruling class have conditioned many on the Left to recoil in horror at the mere mention of the word, the fact remains that conspiracies are everywhere, that the government and corporations are involved in them, and that refusing to question received narratives and facts for fear of being tarred and feathered as a “conspiracy nut” is precisely the sort of mindless twaddle that has become all too pervasive on the Left.

And so, armed with my bullshit detector, and with full knowledge that many potential angry emailers have already stopped reading, I now dive into the morass that is the #OregonOccupation.

Questions about the Key Players

While much can be said about Ammon Bundy, the son of Nevada rancher (and well known [racist](#)) Cliven Bundy, the real suspicion lies with three of the “activists” widely regarded as instrumental in organizing the occupation. By examining what is known and unknown about these three shady characters, a much different picture begins to emerge, one in which a publicity stunt-cum-armed occupation is less an act of protest, and more an act of provocation.

First up for scrutiny is Ryan Payne, an Army veteran and one of the spokespeople for the occupiers both in Oregon, and during the 2014 standoff at the Bundy Ranch in Nevada. Speaking of the ongoing Oregon occupation, Payne told the [New York Times](#), “We will be here for as long as it takes...People have talked about returning land to the people for a long time. Finally, someone is making an effort in that direction.” Leaving aside the hilariously wrongheaded idea that public lands can be seized and given over to private landowners, and that that would somehow qualify as “returning land to the people,” it is Payne himself who deserves further investigation.

Payne, who served in the US Army in Iraq from 2003-2005, is described in his Army Commendation Medal [certificate](#) as having performed “exceptionally meritorious service as a long range surveillance senior scout observer and assistance team leader” while being part of the [519th Military Intelligence Battalion](#). It strikes me as curious, if not completely suspicious, that a young white veteran of military intelligence happens to have been part of both the Bundy Ranch standoff and the ongoing occupation in Oregon. But maybe I’m just paranoid, right? Maybe he’s just some right wing young veteran with an overzealous desire to effect political change. Well, maybe. But when you consider that this nobody from Nowhere, Montana has become one of the main participants of these two actions in Nevada and Oregon, and that he’s been at the center of nearly every aspect of both incidents, it should certainly raise some questions.

But don’t take it from me. Gary Hunt, a right wing, pro-militia blogger writing at [Canada Free Press](#), had this to say about Payne, “[Payne provided] ‘meritorious service’ at Bunkerville[the Bundy Ranch standoff in 2014], holding the chaotic mass of militia and molding them into a cohesive force.” That certainly does not sound like some Johnny-come-lately just trying to be part of some cool anti-government action. Instead, that sounds like an intelligence operator, someone coordinating actions and groups and maintaining operational security, among other responsibilities. In short, Payne appears from all indications to be a focal point of both episodes.

However, “molding the militia into a cohesive force” was not Payne’s only contribution to

the 2014 standoff. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center report entitled [War in the West](#):

After watching the [viral Cliven Bundy] video from his home in Anaconda, Montana, 650 miles away, Ryan Payne, 30, an electrician and former soldier who had deployed twice to the Iraq war, became enraged [...] Payne left that day with another member of his militia, Jim Lardy, and drove through the night, a few sleeping bags in tow, burning up cell phones hoping to bring every militia member they could. On April 9 he sent out an urgent call for the militias to mobilize. 'At this time we have approximately 150 responding, but that number is growing by the hour,'...Militia snipers lined the hilltops and overpasses with scopes trained on federal agents. What happened was not unplanned. As Payne later told the SPLC, he had ordered certain gunmen [sic] 'to put in counter sniper positions' and others to hang behind at the rance [sic]. '[M]e and Mel Bundy put together the plan for the cohesion between the the Bundys and the militia.... Sending half of the guys up to support the protestors...and keep overwatch and make sure that if the BLM wanted to get froggy, that it wouldn't be good for them.'

According to Payne's own words, and those of his supporters, there is certainly ample reason to suspect that this 30 year old veteran was more than simply a participant in this saga, but that he was one of the principal organizers of nearly every aspect of the event, from recruitment and media penetration to operational control. Payne's message to his fellow right wing militia brothers certainly has the air of provocation as he suggests that they be prepared to lay down their lives in armed struggle against the federal government. "All men are mortal, most pass simply because it is their time, a few however are blessed with the opportunity to choose their time in performance of duty," Payne explained in a thinly veiled threat of potentially lethal violence.

As I adjust my tinfoil hat, allow me to suggest that such words as those uttered by Payne reek of the tactics of *agents provocateurs* whose objective it is to incite violence in order to either discredit a particular targeted group or to effect a confrontation designed to escalate a given conflict. While impossible to say definitively, it seems just based on his words and deeds, that Payne has become what amounts to a coordinator of the militia movement. Whether he is still working for military intelligence, some other intelligence or law enforcement agency, or the FBI, it seems clear that Payne deserves far more scrutiny than the controlled corporate media has given him.

Interestingly, [The Oregonian reported](#) the following:

Among those joining Bundy in the occupation are Ryan Payne, U.S. Army veteran, and Blaine Cooper. Payne has claimed to have helped organize militia snipers to target federal agents in a standoff last year in Nevada. He told one news organization the federal agents would have been killed had they made the wrong move. He has been a steady presence in Burns in recent weeks, questioning people who were critical of the militia's presence. He typically had a holstered sidearm as he moved around the community.

So not only is Payne one of the main coordinators and organizers of the occupation, he seems to also be doing double duty, acting as a liaison while obviously gathering intelligence about the participants, the non-participants, critical voices in the community, etc. Again, one could say he's just a zealous right winger trying to help a cause. But when

you combine the various threads of evidence about his background and his activities, my suspicions are certainly raised. It seems I'm not alone, as many commenters on right wing blogs use phrases like "plant" and "Fed shill" and "agent" when describing Payne. According to sources involved in the Bundy Ranch standoff, some were even accusing Payne of precisely that from the very beginning.

Then there is the man known as Blaine Cooper (given name Stanley Hicks) who poses on his [Facebook page](#) in military fatigues with sniper rifles and a veritable potpourri of other weapons claiming to be a "patriot" defending the rights of citizens. Cooper aka Hicks [enlisted in the Marines](#) in the Delayed Entry Program which allows prospective soldiers a year before they have to report to boot camp. However, according to US Marine Corps [records](#), Cooper/Hicks never showed up. This failure to honor his signed commitment, coupled with more than a dozen arrests and convictions under the name Stanley Hicks, might account for why he changed his name to Cooper and reinvented himself as a self-styled militia leader.

Cooper/Hicks is well known on YouTube within right wing militia circles, with tens of thousands of views of his various

. He has also falsely presented himself as a member of the Oath Keepers, another militia organization that has featured prominently in various exploits, including their much maligned visible [presence in Ferguson](#), Missouri at the height of the protests over the murder of Mike Brown. Here is what [Stewart Rhodes](#), a founder and President of the Oath Keepers had to say about Cooper/Hicks

(see also 15:01 OathKeepersOK 01 Jan 2016 Views: 9 k

Actually, he [Cooper/Hicks] has never been a member of Oath Keepers. Being a felon, he is automatically disqualified and inelligible [sic] for membership in our org, nor has he ever tried to join. He has paraded around in an Oath Keepers T shirt, and misrepresented himself as being onr [sic] of us, and has used our logo without our permission in some of his idiotic crap he has done. He is a loose cannon retard and blow-hard...But he is not an Oath Keeper.

Interestingly, the Oath Keepers, along with a number of other militia organizations, have been quick to distance themselves from the Burns, Oregon occupation, and from the likes of Payne and Cooper. According to a [statement](#) on the Oath Keepers website, the organization disavows the actions of Payne, Cooper & Co., making clear that "In the Hammond case, there is no clear and present danger of the family being mass murdered, there is no stand off [sic], and the family has no intent of starting one ... If you want to go protest, by all means do so ... but do not allow yourselves to be roped into an armed stand off [sic] the Hammonds do not want."

Similarly, the Oregon chapter of the Three Percenters, another right wing militia organization, released [statement](#) on their Facebook page in which they explained that:

Unbeknownst to the Idaho 3%, Oregon 3%, it's [sic] leaders, associations, rally participants, or the citizens of Harney County; **these actions were premeditated and carried out by a small group of persons who chose to carry out this takeover after the rally** [emphasis added]. The 3% of Idaho, 3% of Oregon, The Oregon Constitutional Guard, and PPN organizations in no way condone nor support these actions. They do not mirror our

vision, mission statement, or views in regards to upholding the Constitution, The Rule of Law, or Due Process.

(Also, check out this from Cooper and read the comments which, aside from the standard anti-semitic nonsense, are littered with commenters accusing Cooper of being a liar, a plant, a provocateur, an agent.)

Such strongly worded disavowals and condemnations indicate that Payne, Cooper, and their cohort are manufacturing this incident entirely. Whether or not the disagreement between the militias and the occupiers is purely a matter of tactics, or something more deeply rooted, including suspicions about the motives and connections of Payne and Cooper, this is a question for those involved in these groups. At the very least however, it seems that segments of the right wing militia movement are not exactly embracing these actions.

Finally we come to the loathsome buffoon Jon Ritzheimer. If that name rings a bell, it should; Ritzheimer was the [organizer and sponsor](#) of the “Draw Muhammad” contest in Phoenix, Arizona which made national headlines. One important aspect of the protest outside a Phoenix area mosque which coincided with the contest was the fact that Ritzheimer was deliberately provoking both the Muslim community and the hardcore right wingers who participated in the protest. Ritzheimer described the rally as being “about pushing out the truth about Islam.” However, according to the event’s Facebook page (since deleted but quoted by the [Washington Times](#)), “This will be a PEACEFUL protest in front of the Islamic Community Center in Phoenix AZ... Everyone is encouraged to bring American flags and any message that you would like to send to the known acquaintances of the 2 gunmen... People are also encouraged to utilize their second amendment right at this event just in case our first amendment right comes under the much anticipated attack.”

While Ritzheimer talked up his event as a “peaceful protest,” it’s quite clear that there was a not so subtle implied threat of violence, just as there was at Bunkerville, just as there is in Burns, Oregon today. The salient point is not that these are gun-toting lunatics, but rather that they are being lured into a potentially dangerous and violent confrontation by an individual whose intentions are suspect to say the least.

A further indication that Ritzheimer’s objective is provocation rather than protest is his outlandishly stupid, and incredibly irresponsible, “roadtrip” to New York where he planned to confront the Muslims of America organization which had referred to him as the “American Taliban.” What is particularly interesting is that Ritzheimer was in [communication with the FBI](#) throughout the trip until he allegedly cut off communication. How does an allegedly anti-government right wing activist spend hours talking on the phone with Federal agents? Perhaps, as some are likely to say, I’m reading too much into this. Well, the right wing militia types who have been suggesting that Ritzheimer is a provocateur might also be “reading too much into this.”

Cui Bono?

The question of motive is obviously front and center when considering the potential that the entire Oregon Occupation is being staged. Why would the handlers of these potential *agents provocateurs* want to do this? Here are some, but certainly not all, of the possible motives:

1. Create a situation that is likely to escalate in order to then use it to justify

everything from increasingly draconian anti-terror legislation (especially “domestic” terrorism) to potential dragnet policing of the radical fringes on both left and right. Nothing would justify a crackdown on radical environmentalists, armed self-defense organizations (be they Oath Keepers or the [Huey P. Newton Gun Club](#)), revolutionary communists and anarchists, and other such groups better than a nice, messy, dramatic event in Oregon.

2. Use this event, and others like it, as a means of discrediting, dividing, and factionalizing not merely the right wing organizations, but all groups who see corporations and the State as the enemy. As communist writer and journalist Harriet Parsons correctly [wrote](#) in 1980:

The state’s tactics fall into two broad categories, spying and provocation... The government boasts that over 87% of the information on revolutionaries collected by the state comes from informants, members of organizations solicited by the police or people placed within a group to gather information. Once in the organization, the informants worm their way into key positions in order to have access to critical information about the leadership and tactical plans... In some cases, agents within will try to push the line of the organization to an incorrect position on the right or left so as to discredit the Party’s work among the masses... Excellent examples of this technique can be seen in the government’s disruption of the mass organizations engaged in the anti-war movement in the 1960s... FBI agents often offered to supply dynamite and weapons to the radicals to encourage terrorist action which would raise public sentiment against them and make them vulnerable to legal prosecution.

3. Manufacture some sort of heroism or martyrdom on the part of the occupiers in order to promote right wing extremist ideology which will appeal to an increasing segment of the population, particularly in light of recent developments ranging from the ascendance of Trumpism to the ongoing economic breakdown of the middle class. In doing so, the ruling class then ‘lances the boil’ of activism and revolutionary energies, directing them to fascistic, nationalistic dead ends rather than to a genuine mass movement centered on the rights of working people and the poor. In other words, social engineering.

Naturally there are likely many other possible motives for manufacturing the sort of fiasco that is unfolding in Burns, Oregon. Whatever the true motives, one thing is clear: what’s happening in Oregon is dangerous, unproductive, and dare I say, counter-revolutionary.

I should note that, as if it weren’t already plainly obvious, I’m not a supporter of right wing militia groups in the US, though I do share some of their concerns in regards to the police state and the corporate entity called the US Government. Nor am I a fan of that nebulous thing called the “Patriot Movement,” riddled as it is with anarcho-capitalist claptrap, radical libertarian pseudo-politics, racism, xenophobia, and outright fascism.

However, that aside, it is important to separate what’s real from what’s manufactured. There are real people with real grievances and a genuine desire to roll back the fascist police state in this movement. It is precisely such activists who are the REAL target of the Oregon occupation, and along with them, so too are any radical activists who want to use direct action to effect change.

While many on the left and right are mesmerized by Bernie and Trump and the non-revolutionary “revolutions” they represent, the ruling class knows perfectly well that true

revolution will come from below. Oregon might just be yet another effort to cut the legs out from under it.

Correction: *A previous version of this article incorrectly attributed a quotation to a journalist. It has since been removed, and a formal apology issued to the journalist.*

The original source of this article is [Stop Imperialism](#)

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