

20 Men With Guns Confront Solo Armed Black Protester at Utah Capitol

BY **EWAN PALMER**

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A group of around 20 armed men confronted a black male taking part in a solo demonstration at the Utah State Capitol in protest at police brutality and the treatment of African Americans in the country.

John Sullivan, of the Insurgence USA activist group, was armed with a rifle for around two hours during what was promoted online as a "Solo Armed Stance" in protest at the unidentifiable agents who have been seen forcing protesters into unmarked vehicles in Portland, Oregon.

Sullivan was arrested at his home on July 9 for crimes he allegedly committed during a June 29 protest at the Provo Police Station.

On Wednesday, around 20 members of the Utah Citizens' Alarm (UCA) group arrived at Sullivan's "solo armed protest," resulting in small confrontations between the two opposing groups.

"Just as [police protesters] have the right to their First Amendment rights and to exercise that, we also have the Second Amendment, which allows us to bear arms," UCA leader Casey Robertson told *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

"We want to be a deterrent for anyone that wants violence in our communities, and [being armed] is loud and clear deterrent for anyone who wants to destroy, kill, attack, that there are people here who will practice their Second Amendment rights."

The UCA formed after a truck driver was allegedly shot by a protester at the Provo demonstration on June 29. The victim, a 60-year-old Provo man, was shot at in his SUV while trying to avoid the protesters who had gathered outside the station. Two men, Jesse Keller Taggart, 33, and Bradley Glenn Walters, 29, have been charged in connection to the shooting.

The UCA has more than 15,000 members on its Facebook page. Its declared goals are to protect communities in Utah from "violent protesters and anarchists."

Ahead of the protest, Insurgence USA released a statement saying how the "country is split" between those standing up for equal rights and treatment of Black people, and those forming armed groups that are "objecting to those rights."

"On top of this, we live in a scary reality where these armed citizens hardly differ from unmarked government officials-groups of which, have been appearing at a frightening rate across the nation," the statement added.

Earlier this month, the ACLU of Utah expressed concerns at how police officers were seen to "joke with, fist bump, and accept water bottles" from Black Lives Matter counter-protesters who have "publicly embraced white supremacist views."

"By doing so, whether police were aware of the ideologies that these groups have openly embraced, these actions conveyed a message of solidarity with counter-protesters and the ideologies which they espoused," the ULCU said in a statement.

"Rather than serving as a public safety entity to those present at or observing the protests, officers' actions and the way they positioned themselves during the events intimated a specific message of disagreement with the calls for racial justice."

The ULCU did not name the UCA in its statement.

Speaking to The Salt Lake Tribune, Robertson claimed the UCA works closely with law enforcement and acts as "extra eyes and ears for the police."

Utah Highway Patrol (UHP) officers were in attendance at the protests at the Capitol. It is unclear if any arrests were made.

UHP have been contacted for comment.