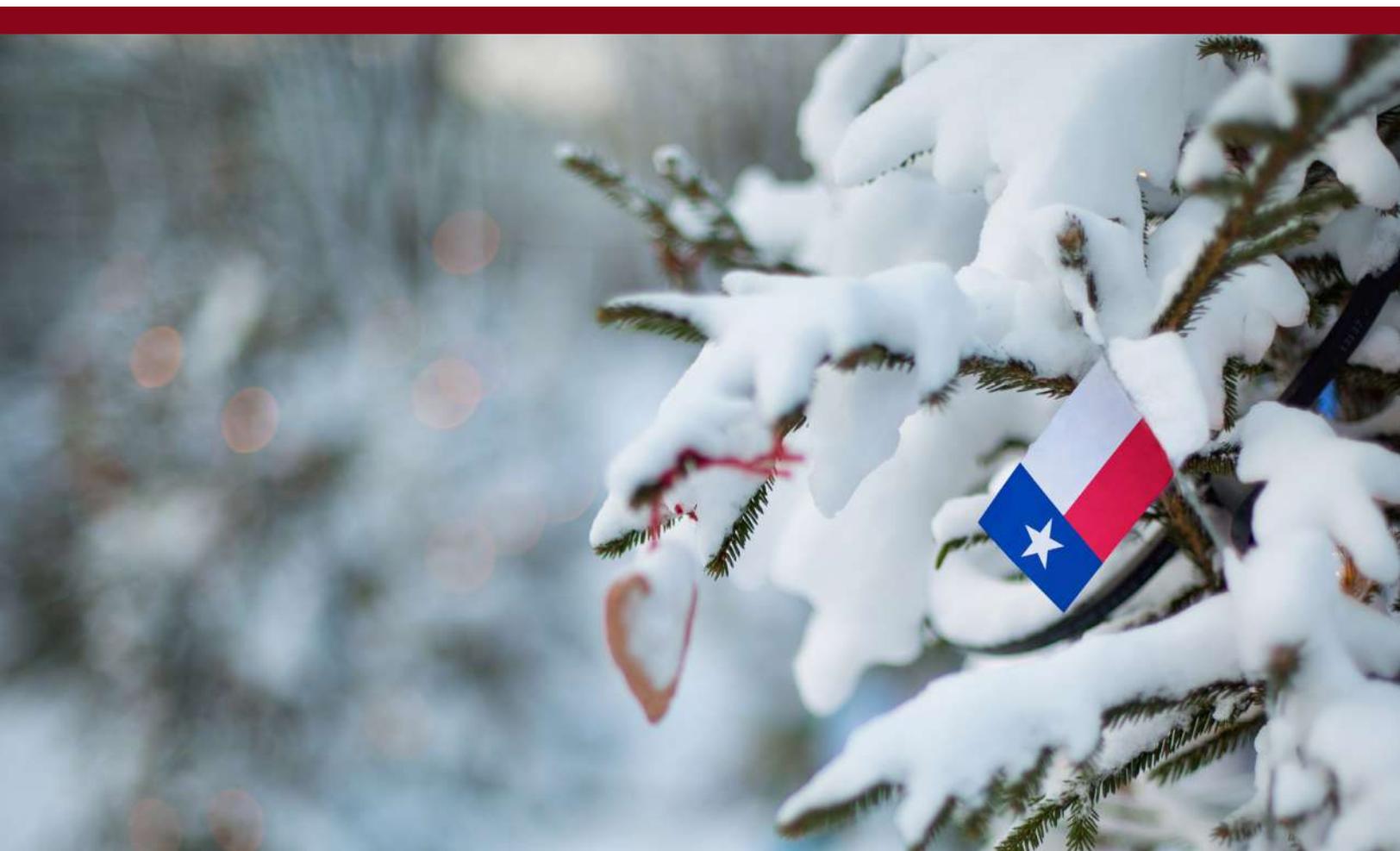


Risks Abound As Antifa-Aligned “Mutual Aid” Groups Respond To Texas Storms

BY KYLE SHIDELER

SENIOR ANALYST FOR HOMELAND SECURITY
AND COUNTERTERRORISM



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After a wave of deadly ice storms in Texas led to [massive state-wide power outages](#),¹ the media has been replete with well-written narratives about neighbors helping neighbors make it through the days and weeks without power, heat, water and food.

“How mutual aid groups are helping Texas,” wrote [Vox](#)’s Terry Nguyen.²

“Texans used mutual aid to help their communities through a devastating winter storm” was the headline of Marissa Martinez’s [Texas Tribune](#) article.³

Even music magazine Rolling Stone [got in on the effort](#), proclaiming, “Where to donate to help people in need during Texas’ blackout crisis” and offering a list of “mutual aid” groups available to receive donations.⁴

It is perfectly normal, of course, for Americans to take pride in community members coming together to help each other in crisis—and even admirable for journalists to promote this kind of community response. Unfortunately, few journalists bothered

to examine the true nature of mutual aid despite its slogan of “solidarity not charity.”

What Is Mutual Aid?

The reality, however, is that mutual aid is a loaded term used primarily by hard left and anarchist organizations. This should have been easy for journalists to learn given that mutual aid practitioners rarely disguise their political motives. Even the website Wikipedia—an easily available but not always reliable source—classifies mutual aid as an [Anarcho-Communism “concept.”](#)⁵

Within the ideological framework of practitioners, mutual aid is considered to be just another form of “[direct action](#), which is understood as “using your assets and personal capabilities to directly implement the change you desire, instead of asking someone else with formal authority to make the change on your behalf.”⁶

While the term direct action does not necessarily



Figure 1 - Tweet from PNW Youth Liberation Front

imply a violation of the law, illegal activities including assaults, vandalism, squatting, sabotage, trespassing, and theft are all included under the rubric. A recent story about activists clashing with Portland police who broke up a [dumpster dive attempt](#) seizing resources for a mutual aid project shows the close connection between direct action and mutual aid.⁷

As the Pacific North West Chapter of the Antifa group Youth Liberation Front noted in a recent tweet, “Most of Portland’s ‘mutual aid’ is more direct action than Portland’s public ‘direct actions’ are.”⁸ (See Figure 1)

Consider for example some of the groups that journalists —some perhaps unwittingly—were promoting.

All of the news articles cited above drew their lists of mutual aid organizations from the [same apparent Google document](#), organized by a group called MOVE Texas, which describes itself as “a nonpartisan, nonprofit, grassroots organization building power in underrepresented youth communities through civic education, leadership development, and issue advocacy.”⁹

Curiously, some of those groups were also highlighted by the Antifa website It’s Going Down, which more

accurately described the mutual aid groups under the headline “Autonomous Mutual Aid Groups.”¹⁰ *Autonomous* refers to groups that organize around the ideology of autonomism, an anarcho-communist ideology that motivates Antifa and its allies. It’s Going Down is a site often used by Antifa and similar anarchist groups to propagandize and anonymously take credit for illegal direct actions.

One of the mutual aid groups mentioned in the Google document, Mutual Aid Houston, describes itself as “a BIPOC-led abolitionist collective.” *Abolitionist* in this context means [abolishing all law enforcement](#) as part of a revolutionary effort.¹¹ An archived copy of the Mutual Aid Houston website shows that funds the group receives go not just to providing traditional aid but also to “jail support, protest support, and resource consolidation.”¹²

Mutual Aid Houston raised at least \$291,000 [on GoFundMe](#) and claimed to have distributed at least \$195,000 in direct aid within 72 hours, according to their Facebook page. Among the groups Mutual Aid Houston says it works with is “Food Not Bombs,” a vegan food collective with a long history of radical organizing. In 2006 [it was reported](#) that Food Not Bombs was included on an FBI terrorism watch list.¹³

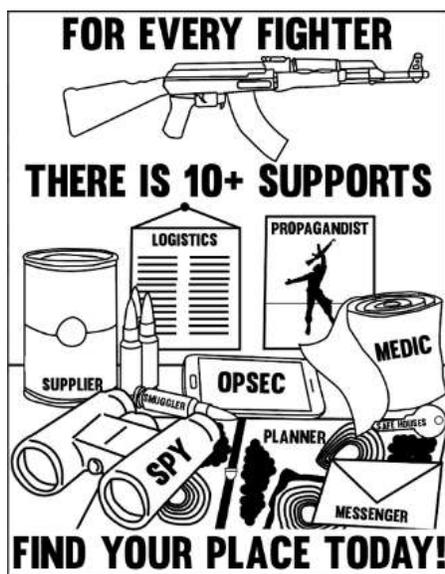


Figure 3 - Poster by Twitter user "Community Agitating Solidarity Soldier" shared by SRA DFW Twitter Account

Community Armed Self-Defense and Dual Power

This image accurately reflects the view that mutual aid is only part of a larger organizing concept known as "community armed self-defense." As anarchist Scott Crow notes in his work *Setting Sights: Histories and Reflections on Community Armed Self Defense*, "the use of arms is only effective for the long term if it is part of a *dual power* framework. Dual power means resisting exploitation and oppression as part of other efforts in self-sufficiency and self-determination."¹⁵

The phrase *dual power* was coined by Vladimir Lenin to describe the deliberate strategy of moving power away from the Russian provisional government into the Petrograd Soviet, where the Bolsheviks and its allies held sway.¹⁶

The goal of a dual power strategy is to supplant the state's functions through an alternative *de facto* government structure. Mutual aid allows people to seize "from below" power previously understood as

being reserved to the government or other institutions.

One of the mutual aid organizations listed, the Houseless Organizing Coalition (HOC), describes itself as a "revolutionary coalition organizing and building dual power within Houston's houseless community." In explaining their own commitment to the concept, HOC cites George Jackson, co-founder of the Black Guerilla Family, a Marxist black power prison gang. HOC writes in a series of tweets:

Mutual aid programs like ours understand, as Jackson says, that in order to feed consciousness, we must also feed the people. We realize that this work is critical to upending the intentionally ineffective and PERFORMATIVE bureaucracy of a so called "Democratic" metropolis. Power must not only be seized from the hands of the elite, it must be channeled and cultivated back into our communities through robust programs

based in equity and love. Programs that have been started by the people and will be operated by the people, not the capitalist state. To quote George Jackson once more, we must “discover ways of meeting and overcoming resistance, demonstrating to ourselves that ‘we can’...” and, perhaps you agree, We believe in Us. All Power to All People.¹⁷

Mutual aid should be understood within a broader strategy of undermining government authority by establishing alternative institutions. Few supporters of mutual aid are shy about making clear this point if one takes the time to listen. As one supporter wrote in a tweet linked in the Vox piece noted:

Remember this week that mutual aid groups helped you more than your government. Remember that when ppl try to tell you that the most powerful thing you can do is vote. That is a lie. We’ve always had revolutionary potential in our community. We always help each other in struggle.¹⁸

Trouble Ahead?

Texas is now facing a situation where hundreds of thousands of dollars are flowing into the hands of an interlocking network of organizations several of which are on record as radical revolutionary leftists or anarchists. Most of this money is coming in through a variety of money-giving apps like Venmo and

CashApp, or through crowdfunding websites like the previously mentioned GoFundMe, with minimal -if any- accountability.

This has led to additional problems. As cash poured in at levels above that which companies Venmo and Cash App [support according to their terms of service](#), it caused companies to put a hold on some mutual aid group’s transactions. Several of these mutual aid groups responded by seeking to pressure the companies on social media under the hashtag #StopThe Holds.

In one case the group NotMySonDFW -which was reportedly dispersing money to allow homeless individuals and others affected by the storm to stay at a Dallas hotel- claimed that the holds might have resulted in families being forced to vacate their rooms. Reportedly over 85 of the hotel’s 89 rooms [were being occupied](#) by mutual aid recipients.

NotMySonDFW is linked to a group called the Watchmen TX (the founders of each organization [are spouses](#), and the two groups shared website space). Watchmen TX is a largely African American group which provides “community protection” at BLM and anti-policing protests and are often seen wearing tactical gear and carrying firearms. (See Figure 4)

The open carry of firearms is legal in Texas, but this example again demonstrates the close connection between “community armed defense” and mutual aid organizations operating as part of a dual power strategy.

While there is no indication of any ill-intent in this specific hotel situation, there has been a growing



Figure 4 - Image Watchmen TX posing with firearms from *Notmysondallas.com*.

national campaign of hotel occupations as part of a deliberate strategy being carried out by autonomist anarchists and other radical left groups. Erin Smith, a contributing author to [Unmasking Antifa: Five Perspectives on a Growing Threat](#) recently [described the tactic](#):

The prefigurative direct action aspect of the recent hotel occupations comes when a block of hotel rooms is rented for one night and a group of homeless is placed in these rooms, who then refuse to vacate once the stay is up.

Meanwhile, supporters forcibly occupy the lobby and common areas and conduct a sit-in protest, obstructing the hotel's daily business. The group then demands the city or county take advantage of a recent FEMA policy change that offers 100% reimbursement to local governments for funds spent on non-congregate housing, by leaving the homeless in

place and accepting responsibility for paying the hotel bills moving forward. The other option is forcibly evicting them, which can be dangerous and resource intensive, not to mention a potential public relations disaster. The latest Oly Housing Now action on January 31 required a SWAT team to clear the hotel and deploy flashbangs to dislodge a particularly resistant group of squatters.¹⁹

There is a risk that -either through mismanagement of funds, being cut off by cash transfer apps, or by strategic intent- the purchase of hotel rooms by mutual aid organizations may transition into a deliberate squatting/occupation campaign. Local government officials and law enforcement should carefully monitor the potential for unrest and develop plans to address this growing trend.

Backed by National Groups

The influence of Texas-based mutual aid groups was expanded by nationwide organizations, particularly the extreme environmentalist group [Sunrise Movement](#) and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).²⁰ Sunrise Movement sought to use the Texas ice storm to promote its views on Green New Deal economic policy. [In a series of tweets](#) the group echoed the language of mutual aid and dual power:

We know that when our lights go out, there are neighborhoods like Governor Abbot's whose don't. The rest of us? We come together as a community & pitch in to make sure everyone is ok. What if our government was there for us the way we are for each other? That's the Green New Deal. What if our government worked as hard as we do to take care of our communities in a crisis? Imagine a well-paid civilian corps of climate crisis responders, showing up to help us out when disaster strikes.²¹

The Sunrise Movement has previously cooperated with Antifa-aligned groups to target politicians they oppose. In one such example, [Sunrise D.C. worked alongside Shutdown D.C.](#) to harass U.S. Senator Lindsay Graham (R-SC).²² Shutdown D.C. is sponsored by All Out D.C., [a D.C. Antifa chapter](#).²³ Shutdown D.C.'s founder [is currently facing a criminal complaint](#) from the wife of Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) over allegations the group violated local laws that

prohibit “picketing” outside a personal residence.²⁴

In a protest action outside the offices of oil and natural gas company Comstock Resources, one of the leaders of Sunrise Movement Dallas [was quoted as saying](#), “Join together, because the government won't do anything. We have to organize.”²⁵

One can see the mutual aid/dual power concept at work.

The Sunrise Movement's Dallas chapter was one of the participants of the Texas mutual aid network, and its entire national organization amplified efforts on social media to direct funds to members of the Texas mutual aid network. Similarly, the DSA also sought to use the Texas storms [for propaganda purposes](#) and promoting the Green New Deal through the affiliated group Power for Texas.²⁶

The DSA North Texas organization also urged donations to the Elms Fork JBGC as part of the Texas mutual aid effort. This serves as additional evidence that DSA engages in support for Antifa.²⁷ (See Figure 5)

These national level organizations can provide a significant signal boost to smaller mutual aid organizations, allowing them to raise funds far in excess of their perceived capability. Additionally, groups like the Sunrise Movement and the DSA have the ability to move volunteers and supporters to the region and can call upon extensive relationships with national-level political figures, some of whom [have publicly committed](#) to the mutual aid concept.²⁸ This can create a significant challenge for local officials who



Figure 5 - Tweet from DSA North Texas

must contend with the behavior of autonomous groups when it is simultaneously being lauded by mainstream media outlets and excused by those with nationwide platforms.

Conclusion

During any natural disaster, extremist and terrorist groups may use the chaos in order to fundraise, propagandize, and recruit others to their cause. Examples include jihadist groups responding [to the 2014 Pakistani earthquake](#)²⁹ and [Mexican drug cartels distributing](#) COVID-19 aid supplies.³⁰ Some terrorist organizations [such as Hezbollah](#) and [Hamas have sophisticated](#) charity networks that rival anything local governments can provide.³¹ In most cases this is done for both ideological and strategic reasons.

Local and state law enforcement and other officials should recognize that the same logic applies to domestic groups—specifically Antifa and other anarcho-communist organizations that seek the violent overthrow of the U.S. Constitution.

Unlike fundraising and propagandizing by designated

foreign terrorist organizations, no law prohibits domestic groups from seeking to fundraise or collect charity donations. But such fundraising and charity activity does provide an opportunity for open-source intelligence gathering for local and state law enforcement to establish a better grasp of the networks operating within their areas.

In some cases, there may be opportunities to build fraud and other white-collar crime cases against such groups if there is evidence of misdirection or misappropriation funds collected by mutual aid groups.

As we have noted, there is nothing wrong with neighbors helping each other, and volunteerism has a long tradition in American culture. Criticizing government response to natural disasters is likewise a free-speech-protected act.

But mutual aid must not be understood as simply volunteerism. As its proponents explicitly note, its true purpose is to build up capability for dual power, a kind of shadow governance (as much as avowed anarchists might hate the term) to be exercised by a network of anarcho-communist and autonomous groups. As a

result, the likelihood that mutual aid will also involve the presence of “community armed self-defense” groups like JBGCs and other Antifa groups is high. Such groups do not make a distinction between providing basic aid such as providing water, emergency meal, and motel rentals and direct clashes with law enforcement or others whom they perceive as threatening their agenda.

Local and state officials dealing with natural disasters should urge citizens to avoid contributing to unknown or suspect “mutual aid” organizations and encourage support instead to traditional registered charities. They should likewise respond to an increase in protest and activism activity generated by autonomous groups seeking to use the disaster for propaganda purposes. Finally, they should develop a comprehensive understanding of the extremist groups operating in their areas of responsibility.

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