

2 Texas Men Plotted Coup of Haitian Island to Enslave Women and Children, U.S. Says

The men, who planned to recruit homeless people for the invasion, took Haitian Creole classes and one enrolled in the U.S. Air Force to prepare for an attack by sailboat, prosecutors said.

Rylee Kirk

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The island of Gonave as seen from Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Two Texas men were indicted in a murder and kidnapping plot that called for staging a coup of the island, federal prosecutors said. Credit...Brent McDonald/The New York Times

Two Texas men planned to recruit homeless people to partake in an armed coup of a Haitian island, murder all the men, and turn the women and children into their sex slaves, according to an indictment.

The men, Gavin Rivers Weisenburg, 21, of Allen, Texas, and Tanner Christopher Thomas, 20, of Argyle, Texas, were indicted on Thursday in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas, federal prosecutors said in a news release.

According to the indictment, Mr. Weisenburg and Mr. Thomas started planning their coup in August 2024. The pair planned to travel by sailboat to Gonave, an island of about 87,000 people that is part of Haiti, and take it by force.

To prepare for the coup, the men started learning skills they thought would be helpful. Both were learning Haitian Creole, according to the indictment.

Mr. Weisenburg joined the North Texas Fire Academy in Rockwall, Texas, in August 2024 to learn “command-and-control protocols,” according to the indictment. He failed the fire academy and was dismissed in February 2025.

After failing the academy, Mr. Weisenburg traveled to Thailand to learn how to sail, according to court papers. The men planned to buy a sailboat to reach Gonave but because of the cost, Mr. Weisenburg did not enroll in sailing school.

Mr. Thomas joined the U.S. Air Force in January 2025. He messaged Mr. Weisenburg, telling him he joined the military to help their plans, according to court papers.

Mr. Thomas was first stationed in Germany but got his placement changed to Maryland. The men planned to recruit and pay homeless people from around Washington to join the coup, according to the indictment.

The men also researched guns and ammunition and planned to buy military-style weapons, according to the news release.

Once in control of the island they planned to murder the men and turn the women and children into sex slaves to carry out their rape fantasies, according to the indictment.

The indictment mentioned co-conspirators but did not identify them or say what roles they might have played in the plot. It was not immediately clear how federal officials became aware of the coup plans.

Mr. Weisenburg and Mr. Thomas were charged with conspiracy to kill or kidnap persons in a foreign country. They were also charged with sexual exploitation of children for producing a sexually explicit video of a child, according to the indictment.

A lawyer for Mr. Weisenburg declined to comment. John Helms, a lawyer for Mr. Thomas, said that he would be entering a plea of not guilty on Monday. Mr. Helms said that he did not yet have the government's evidence in the case and that he would be defending Mr. Thomas "vigorously" against the charges.

If convicted of the federal conspiracy to commit murder in a foreign country, the men face up to life in federal prison, prosecutors said. If convicted on the production of child pornography charges, both men would face at least 15 years and up to 30 years in federal prison.

Rylee Kirk reports on breaking news, trending topics and major developing stories for The Times.

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