

Police and Obama administration plan for nationwide crackdown on Ferguson protests

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Local police, the FBI, and police departments throughout the country are preparing a possible nationwide crackdown if a grand jury convened in Missouri fails to press charges against Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson, the man responsible for killing 18-year-old Michael Brown in August.

According to Reuters sources with personal knowledge of the preparations, police and national security officials have been meeting two to three times each week for the purposes of “contingency planning” and “intelligence sharing.”

The explicit purpose of the meetings is the possibility that widespread social opposition would develop in St. Louis and elsewhere if the grand jury fails to indict the policeman for gunning down the unarmed black youth.

Ferguson Mayor James Knowles told Reuters that “the unrest is going to be far beyond the city of Ferguson” if Wilson is not charged when the grand jury reaches its decision. The decision is expected to come in November.

Speaking in Little Rock, Arkansas, yesterday at a national gathering of mayors, Attorney General Eric Holder told the audience that “the events in Ferguson reminded us that we cannot and must not allow tensions, which are present in so many neighborhoods across America, to go unresolved.”

For Holder, the Obama administration, and the police and intelligence agencies, “resolving tensions” means preparing for a nationwide crackdown that would imitate the violent suppression of protests in Ferguson, only on a far wider scale.

In August, local police in military uniform armed with mine-resistant armored vehicles and assault rifles fired tear gas and rubber bullets at protestors. When Democratic Governor Jay Nixon called the Missouri National Guard to Ferguson, a shopping center was

turned into a military base, with Humvees roaming the parking lot and snipers positioned on rooftops.

Coordinated by the Obama administration at the national level, the preparations for such a crackdown in cities across the country mark a new step toward the imposition of police-military rule in the United States.

The planned crackdown would likely require placing those cities where demonstrations occur under effective martial law. The Obama administration has already tested the feasibility of placing a major American city under police control: the city of Boston was shut down and residents told to stay in their homes following the Marathon bombing in April 2013.

Furthermore, those FBI officials dispatched by the dozens to Ferguson in the aftermath of the demonstrations would likely be sent across the country by the hundreds or thousands to monitor and report on protests, were protests to develop. The National Guard would likewise play a central role in such a crackdown.

The response being planned by the government—which Reuters claims have not been finalized—reportedly includes increased surveillance of those participating in demonstrations.

Already, police in St. Louis are justifying increased surveillance of the population of Ferguson on the basis of the age-old bogeyman of “outside agitators.”

“We know outside groups visited us in August. We are expecting that different people will come in from outside the St. Louis area,” St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar said, despite the fact that of the 227 people arrested in the month following Brown’s death, only 36 were from outside Missouri.

Belmar also noted that his department has been in contact with police in Los Angeles, New York, Florida, Cincinnati, Ohio, and numerous other districts in anticipation of wider social upheaval.

It is notable that Belmar is in contact with police in the specific areas he listed. Los Angeles and Cincinnati were the center of upheavals in 1992 and 2001, respectively. In both places, demonstrations broke out in response to instances of brutal police violence. Florida was also the scene of demonstrations in 2013 following the killing of Trayvon Martin.

Belmar's admission underscores the American ruling class' apprehension of growing social tensions. In anticipation of social opposition to its policies of poverty, inequality, and permanent war, the government has established the framework for a police state in the United States.

The plans being drawn up for a national crackdown are an indication that the ruling class is moving closer to measures that directly criminalize protest activity. The "outside agitator" pretext is particularly ludicrous when applied to nationwide protests: where are the "outsiders" coming from? Canada? Mexico?

The plans for a coordinated violent response to protests also make clear the fraudulent character of the "community meetings" between police and what Reuters refers to as "multi-racial citizen groups" in Ferguson. These public meetings, which have been supported from the start by clergymen and by advocates of racial politics like Al Sharpton, have coincided with private police meetings to plan further repression.

The plans to replicate the Ferguson crackdown on a wider scale come as a federal judge ruled Tuesday that the initial police response violated the First Amendment.

The order, written by Judge Catherine Perry of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, enjoins the police "from telling citizens that they must keep moving, or from threatening them with arrest if they stand still" during protests.

The decision is an acknowledgement that the so-called "five-second rule" imposed by police—arresting anyone who refused to move on after five seconds standing in one place—was a clear violation of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. Any wider crackdown would represent an even more egregious violation of basic democratic rights.

But the order was very limited in its restrictions on police. While acknowledging the right to assemble, Judge Perry also wrote that protesters "do not have the right to endanger lives of police officers or other

citizens. The police must perform their jobs, and nothing in this order restricts their ability to do that."



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