

Police launch manhunt in Ferguson, Missouri after officers wounded

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Two police officers were wounded by gunfire from an unknown source in Ferguson, Missouri on Wednesday night, triggering a manhunt by police throughout the city.

Police armed with assault rifles carried out a SWAT raid at the house of one protester, detaining three people at gunpoint. One of those detained in the raid, a single mother, told the *New York Times* that she had nothing to do with the shooting and that her six-year-old son was traumatized by seeing her arrested at gunpoint.

The Obama administration used Wednesday's shooting to restate its support for the police in the face of ongoing demonstrations against police killings. "Violence against police is unacceptable. Our prayers are with the officers in MO," wrote Obama in a twitter post.

The shots took place around midnight as demonstrators were beginning to disperse following a protest in front of the police department. The wounded officers were standing in a line with about 20 other officers, and were shot by a handgun from 125 yards away, police said.

Demonstrators and media personnel said that the shots came from outside the crowd, likely from a nearby hill. But the police, seeking any pretense to paint demonstrators as violent, claimed that the gunshots came from within the group of protesters.

"I don't know who did the shooting...but somehow they were embedded in that group of folks," declared St. Louis County police chief John Belmar. He added, "There was an unfortunate association with the gathering."

DeRay McKesson, a demonstrator who was at the police station at the time, said in a Twitter message, "The shooter was not with the protesters. The shooter

was atop the hill." He added, "I was here. I saw the officer fall. The shot came from at least 500 feet away from the officers," he said.

Given the distance, even the intended target of the shootings is by no means certain, and the possibility that the demonstrators, and not the police, were the target, cannot be ruled out.

According to Belmar, up to four shots were fired. One hit a 32-year-old officer in the face, and another officer, 41, was hit in the shoulder. Both officers were discharged from the hospital later Thursday, despite the fact that Belmar had said that their wounds were life-threatening.

Local and federal officials seized on the shooting in order to once again paint protests as violent and dangerous.

Despite admitting that he had no knowledge as to the identity of the shooter, Belmar declared, "When you look at the tenor of at least some of the people involved in the protest or civil unrest, it can be troubling." He added that "I think it's a miracle that we haven't had any instances similar to this over the summer and fall."

US Attorney General Eric Holder declared that the attack was "a pure ambush." He added, "This was not someone who was trying to bring healing to Ferguson, this was a damn punk."

The shooting occurred just hours after Ferguson Police Chief Thomas Jackson announced his resignation following last week's release of a Justice Department report documenting a "pattern" of criminal abuses by the Ferguson Police Department. The report found that Ferguson police illegally brutalized and detained people, and that the city's court system used arrest warrants to raise revenue.

On Monday, the Missouri Supreme Court said it would place a state judge in charge of the city's courts.

The Ferguson municipal judge, Ronald J. Brockmeyer, said that he had resigned his post. These moves followed the announcement earlier in the week that Ferguson's City Manager John Shaw would resign.

On Thursday evening, the St. Louis County Police and the Missouri State Highway Patrol took over security in connection with the Ferguson protests. Similar measures were taken in August when a state of emergency was imposed in the city following the shooting of Michael Brown.

Major media outlets sought to use the shootings to shift the tone of their coverage directly in support of the police, despite a string of high-profile murders carried out by the police, including Friday's killing of 19-year-old Anthony Robinson in Madison, Wisconsin. (See: "The paramilitary occupation of America")

CNN declared that the shooting was part of a "disturbing trend" of attacks on police. It prominently quoted Craig W. Floyd, chairman and CEO of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, who declared, "I am deeply concerned that a growing antigovernment sentiment in America is influencing weak-minded individuals to launch violent assaults against the men and women working to enforce our laws and keep our nation safe."

The official response to the shooting paralleled the aftermath of the December 20 killing of two patrolmen by a mentally troubled man in Brooklyn, New York, which was seized upon by the political establishment to attack protesters and hail the police.

After that shooting, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio called for an end to the demonstrations, and police carried out arrests throughout the country in response to "threatening" posts on social media.



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