

Police engaged in 25-minute shootout with Texas high school gunman

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It has been three days since a horrific school shooting took the lives of eight students and two teachers, and wounded 13 others, at a high school in Santa Fe, Texas. In a scene all too familiar in America, a lone gunman—student Dimitrios Pagourtzis—entered Santa Fe High School, about 35 miles southeast of Houston, and started shooting.

On Friday morning, Pagourtzis hid a shotgun and a .38-caliber handgun under his trench coat before opening fire in his first-period art class. Student Breanna Quintanilla, 17, who was wounded during the assault, said she was in the classroom on what she described as a “perfectly normal day” when she heard the shots ring out. She said that when Pagourtzis walked in, he pointed a weapon at one person and said, “I’m going to kill you.”

Galveston County Sheriff Henry Trochesset told CNN Sunday that the shooting lasted for a terrifying 30 minutes. The first shots were fired not long after classes began around 7:30 a.m. local time. Officers arrived at the high school art lab section about four minutes into the shooting and encountered the shooter, according to Trochesset.

For the next 25 minutes, police officers and the gunman engaged in a gunfight. When asked by CNN whether all of the victims were shot by Pagourtzis, Trochesset said that authorities will need to determine that after the medical examiner completes the autopsies. His response leaves open the question of whether some of the victims were in fact shot by police officers responding to the shooting. Trochesset said that “a decent amount of cameras” were in the school, and that video would be examined.

According to a police affidavit, Pagourtzis “gave a statement admitting to shooting multiple people inside the Santa Fe High with the intent on killing people.” Police said the shooter “advised he did not shoot students he did like so he could have his story told.”

Texas Governor Greg Abbott, a Republican, said Pagourtzis had planned to kill himself after the shooting, but that the young man told police “that he didn’t have the courage to commit the suicide.”

The incident came just over three months after the

shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, which claimed the lives of 14 students and three staff members in one of the deadliest school massacres in recent history. Students across the country and the world, outraged over the shootings and loss of life, rallied in massive demonstrations on March 24 and staged school walkouts on April 20, including at Santa Fe High School, to protest gun violence.

Pagourtzis has been charged with capital murder and aggravated assault of a police officer.

He appeared in court Friday evening via video link from the Galveston County Jail. A judge denied him bond and took his application for a court-appointed lawyer.

Texas Rep. Michael McCaul, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, said he expects the Justice Department to pursue additional charges, possibly involving weapons of mass destruction in connection with pipe bombs, at least one Molotov cocktail and inactive pressure-cooker bombs found on the school grounds.

As in many such shootings, there were hints about the shooter’s motivation in hindsight, but few red flags before the incident. One of Pagourtzis’ Facebook posts was a picture of a T-shirt inscribed with “Born to Kill.” Another post showed a trench coat decorated with a Nazi cross, a hammer and sickle, and Cthulhu, a mythical creature drawn from horror fiction writer H.P. Lovecraft.

Pagourtzis had written in journals on his computer and cellphone about planning the attack. Friends described him as reserved and quiet, an athlete who discussed wanting to own guns but didn’t talk of killing people. Student Michael Farina, who considered the shooter a friend, said he and Pagourtzis talked a lot about video games they liked, including the first-person shooter game “Escape from Tarkov.”

Pointing to a possible motive, Sadie Rodriguez, the mother of one of the 10 people killed, told the Associated Press that her daughter, Shana Fisher, had rejected Pagourtzis’ romantic advances one week before the shooting. “He continued to get more aggressive,” Rodriguez said. “She

finally stood up to him and embarrassed him.”

Whatever the motive, Pagourtzis was clearly an emotionally disturbed young man to have lashed out with such horrifying violence Friday morning. However, the reaction to the Santa Fe shooting—the 22nd such incident this year according to CNN—was entirely predictable and cynical. While ignoring the social roots of such shootings, both Democrats and Republicans seized on the most recent event to advance their own political agendas.

Typical for the Democrats were the remarks of former Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm, who argued that the only solution was to elect politicians in the upcoming mid-term elections who were not beholden to the National Rifle Association (NRA). “I’m saying there’s one solution,” she said. “The one solution is at the ballot box. Take them out at the ballot box if they do not agree that we should have common sense gun solutions.”

Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, a Republican, addressed the incident as purely a police matter. “We need our teachers to be armed,” he told CNN’s “State of the Union” Sunday. “We need to get down to one or two entrances into our schools,” he said, adding, “You have then necessary exits for fire, of course, but we have to funnel our students into our schools so we can put eyes on them.”

Patrick called for “gun control at home,” to keep firearms out of children’s reach, a proposal he knows is unlikely to be enforced or implemented, or to result in any reduction in gun violence. Appearing on ABC’s “This Week” he blamed the nation’s debased culture. “We have devalued life, whether it’s through abortion, whether it’s the breakup of families, through violent movies and particularly violent video games.”

Incoming NRA President Oliver North blamed the rash of school shootings on violent video games and the attention deficit hyperactivity disorder medication Ritalin. “The problem that we’ve got is we’re trying like the dickens to treat the symptom without treating the disease,” he said. “And the disease in this case isn’t the Second Amendment. The disease is youngsters who are steeped in a culture of violence.”

Oliver North’s talk of a “culture of violence” is rich indeed. He earned notoriety for his participation in the Iran-Contra affair, a political scandal during the Reagan administration in which he claimed responsibility for the sale of weapons through intermediaries to Iran, with the profits channeled to the Contras in Nicaragua used to gun down Latin American workers and youth.

And while he may claim that “life imitates art,” in the form of video games causing school shootings, in fact it is the violence of American society that fosters despondency, anger—and the possible ensuing violence—among America’s

youth.

Young people in high school today have never lived a day in which the United States has not been at war. Politicians of both big business parties support the repressive apparatus of the US and its allies, as in the recent massacres of Palestinians by Israel in Gaza. Police shootings of unarmed youth are a daily event in cities and towns across the country.

President Trump, ranting against the nonexistent crime wave caused by immigrants coming across the US southern border, denounces immigrants fleeing violence in Central America as “criminal aliens” and “animals.”

Such comments promote a dehumanized atmosphere, in which young people today struggle to find their way and are often beset by depression and other mental health problems. Recent studies have shown a tripling in emergency room and hospital encounters for suicide-related diagnoses for children and adolescents. Another study shows that more than one in 20 US children and teens suffers from anxiety or depression.

Appeals for an increased police presence and electing more anti-NRA Democrats to office will do nothing to address the mental crisis affecting the youth of America. There is no outrage in the halls of Congress over the lack of mental health care, Medicaid and food stamp cuts, or the opioid crisis gripping cities and towns across the country.

The rash of school shootings, and the inability of the political establishment to address the roots of this crisis, demonstrates the futility of appealing to the powers-that-be to address the issue of school violence. Only a turn to the working class can mobilize the genuine anger and outrage of young people in Santa Fe, Parkland and schools across the nation in a struggle against the capitalist system, which fosters all that is brutal and violent in American society and can drive a teenager to gun down his classmates.



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