

We need to temper our words and open our hearts: Barack Obama on Baton Rouge Shooting

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Washington: US President Barack Obama condemned the shooting of sic law enforcement officers which killed three in Baton Rouge and urged Americans to tamp down inflammatory words and actions as US grapples with another major attack on police officers after July 7 Dallas shooting.

Barack Obama

“We as a nation have to be loud and clear that nothing justifies violence against law enforcement,” Obama said from the White House press briefing room. “Attacks on police are an attack on all of us, and the rule of law that makes society possible. We need to temper our words and open our hearts” all of us.”

Obama acknowledged that one of the surviving police officers remains in critical condition, and that the gunman’s motives are unknown, as have been reported. The shooter, 29-year-old Gavin Long, died at the scene.

He said he has offered the federal government's full support in the coming days and promised that justice will be done.

Speaking from the White House, Obama noted that he had been in Dallas just five days earlier, speaking after a gunman killed five police officers during a Black Lives Matter rally.

“I said that that killer would not be the last person who tries to make us turn on each other,” Obama said. “Nor will today’s killer. It remains up to us to make sure that they fail.”

Obama said the motive behind Sunday's killing of three officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, was still unknown. It was the latest in a string of deadly incidents involving law enforcement, including the police shooting of a black man in Baton Rouge and the killing of five officers in Dallas.

The president spoke on the eve of the Republican Party's national convention, where Donald Trump will officially accept the GOP nomination. The businessman has cast the recent incidents as a sign that the country needs new leadership, often using heated rhetoric to make his point.

Obama said that going into the political conventions, elected officials and interest groups should focus their words and actions on uniting the country, rather than dividing it.

“We don't need inflammatory rhetoric. We don't need careless accusations thrown around to score political points or to advance an agenda. We need to temper our words and open our hearts ... all of us,” Obama said.

The president also seemed intent on demonstrating again his support for law enforcement. Some organizations have cast doubt on that support. The National Association of Police Organizations said after the Dallas shooting that America was in the midst of a war on law enforcement officers. The group said the administration needed to show political leadership by “supporting them and giving them the resources they need to protect themselves and their communities.”

“Attacks on police are an attack on all of us and the rule of law that makes society possible,” Obama emphasized Sunday.

The president spoke earlier Sunday with Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards and Baton Rouge Mayor Kip Holden to hear the latest on the investigation into the shootings and pledge federal support.

Obama has spent most of the last week focused on defusing tensions and rebuilding trust between police departments and the communities they serve.

On July 7, an Army veteran opened fire on law enforcement in Dallas, killing five and wounding seven other officers. The shooter, who was black, said he wanted to kill white people, especially white officers. Obama spoke at the memorial service for the officers killed and told Americans not to despair, that the nation is not as divided as it might seem.

In his remarks Sunday, Obama reminded people that he had also said the Dallas shooter would not be the last person to try to make Americans turn on each other.

"Nor will today's killer. It remains up to us to make sure that they fail. That decision is all of ours," Obama said.

Following the Dallas memorial, Obama held an extraordinary four-hour meeting at the White House's executive offices with police officers, community activists and elected leaders. He emerged from the session saying "we're not even close" to the point where minority communities could feel confident that police departments were serving them with respect and equality or where police departments could feel adequately supported at all levels. He also said the country would have to "just grind it out" in solving the tensions.

The shooting of the police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge were preceded by police shootings of two black men, Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge and Philando Castile in suburban St. Paul, Minnesota, which sparked protests around the country. Dallas police were defending protesters in that city when the gunman opened fire on them.

- (AP inputs)