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PDF of This Issue

UPDATE TO THIS ARTICLE:

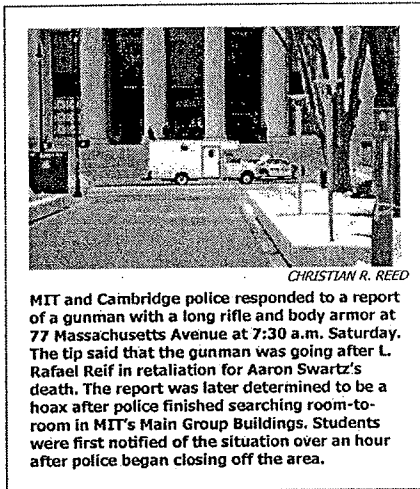
Updated 2/26/13, 6:40 p.m. — The Cambridge Police released a statement at 3:35 p.m. today explaining the source of the report received on Saturday, later declared to be a hoax, of a gunman inside an MIT building. According to the statement, "An internet relay is typically used to allow persons who may have hearing or speech impairments to communicate with any phone user in the US, usually by instant messaging. The relay service used in this instance was a Sprint relay service, and a Sprint employee notified the police department of the conversation with the reporting party."

Saturday report of a gunman on campus a hoax

Tip said gunman was after Reif in retaliation for Swartz death, alerts to students delayed

By Joanna Kao  
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR  
February 26, 2013

The Cambridge Police received a false report early Saturday morning of a "male with a large firearm and wearing body armor" at 77 Massachusetts Avenue. The report was declared to be false around 2.5 hours later after MIT and Cambridge police searched each building room-to-room. Students were not notified of the situation until after an hour after the initial tip.



CHRISTIAN R. REED

MIT and Cambridge police responded to a report of a gunman with a long rifle and body armor at 77 Massachusetts Avenue at 7:30 a.m. Saturday. The tip said that the gunman was going after L. Rafael Reif in retaliation for Aaron Swartz's death. The report was later determined to be a hoax after police finished searching room-to-room in MIT's Main Group Buildings. Students were first notified of the situation over an hour after police began closing off the area.

The report came in as an ongoing, electronic, running message at 7:28 a.m. Two minutes later, Cambridge and MIT officers responded to 77 Mass. Avenue and began searching and clearing administrative offices, classrooms, and bathrooms in MIT's Main Group (central buildings). About 30 officers responded, according to John Boyle, a Cambridge police spokesperson. A special response team was notified and was on standby, but was not needed. The Boston Police department offered resources but was also not needed. State police shut down Massachusetts Avenue between Vassar Street and Memorial Drive at 7:35 a.m. MIT and Cambridge police set up a perimeter around MIT's main buildings, although they ran into students and MIT staff several times during the search. A graduate student commented on MIT News's Facebook page asking if he should leave if he was in the Main Group Building, but no one from MIT responded.

Police radio traffic suggested that the gunman had a long rifle and body armor, was hiding in the bathroom and that he was going after MIT President L. Rafael Reif and school staff in retaliation for the death of Aaron Swartz. It is unclear how long the police were connected to the tipster, but the tipster was disconnected before 7:49 a.m.

The report came in as a running message received via an Internet relay or "electronic messaging system." The tipster's IP address indicated New York, although it does not necessarily mean the tipster was physically in New York. The *Boston Globe* reported that Cambridge Police spokesperson Dan Riviello said, "The threat did not come via one of the department's anonymous tip submission platforms." When asked by *The Tech* via email to clarify the "Internet relay," Riviello declined to comment because of their ongoing investigation.

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Timeline of Saturday's gunman hoax incident, from report to the all-clear

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According to police radio traffic, shortly before 9 a.m., an MIT staff member with the same name as one provided by the hoaxster was questioned by police but was uninvolved with the incident.

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Around 10 a.m., the Cambridge police started to clear the scene, and at 10:19 a.m., the Cambridge Police tweeted, "Scene is clear. Call unfounded. No threat to public safety in #CambMA #MIT." MIT Alert sent a text message at 10:46 a.m. saying "Cambridge Police have issued all-clear. MIT returning to normal operation. MIT PD will monitor campus."

The FBI and Secret Service are working in conjunction with the Cambridge Police to investigate the hoax, according to Cambridge Police Department spokesperson Dan Riviello. In a press conference on Saturday, Cambridge police commissioner Robert Haas said, "If we do indeed identify this person, we will be seeking criminal charges." According to an email from MIT spokesperson Nate Nickerson, however, there is no comment at this time on whether MIT will be pressing charges, and MIT is currently "focused on cooperating in the investigation."

### Timing of emergency alerts

A looming question that remains is why MIT's emergency alert service took so long to send out an alert to students. Cambridge and MIT police were at Mass Ave by 7:30 a.m., but the first alert, which appeared at MIT's emergency information site (*emergency.mit.net*), appeared at 8:47 a.m., more than an hour later. Students signed up for emergency alerts got a text message around 8:51 a.m. and an email was sent out around 9:22 a.m. notifying students of the report and asking them to stay indoors and report suspicious activity to campus police.

In comparison, the Cambridge Police sent out a tweet saying "Report of a possible person with a gun on Massachusetts Ave in #CambMA" at 7:35 a.m.

At a press conference on Saturday, John DiFava, facility operations and security director, said that he was called at his home and "made the call to the appropriate people" after he got in his car and started down Highway 93. "The response from the alert came pretty quickly after I made that phone call," DiFava said. DiFava could not recall what time this happened.

At 8:37 a.m. ten minutes before the first alert from MIT was sent, someone at MIT's control station asked a sergeant if he should get in contact with the Security and Emergency Management Office (SEMO) to send out an alert asking people to stay out of the Main Group (MIT's central buildings), and the sergeant said he would call "the chief and Captain Pierce" who "were out." It is unclear whether DiFava's notification came before or after 8:37 a.m.

When asked about the lag, DiFava said, "I have to look into it and find out the reason for the lag."

Nickerson did not provide any new information when asked about timing of the emergency alerts.

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The Tech • 84 Massachusetts Avenue • Suite 483 • Cambridge, Mass. 02139-4300

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