

US Attorney General Barr boasts of nearly 1,500 arrests through Operation Legend

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On Wednesday, US Attorney General William Barr held a press conference in Kansas City, Missouri, flanked by police and prosecutors, where he announced that nearly 1,500 people had been arrested as part of “Operation Legend,” a federal initiative formally launched on July 8 of this year.

On Thursday, President Donald Trump boasted on Twitter regarding the “arrest of over 1,000 criminals” as part of Operation Legend, proclaiming, “I STAND FOR LAW AND ORDER AND I TOOK ACTION!” Trump claimed his law-and-order crackdown contrasted with “Sleepy Joe Biden and the Radical Left,” which “excuses violence and crime in their Democrat-run cities. I want safety and security, Joe allows CRIME!”

Operation Legend, cynically named after four-year-old LeGend Taliferro, who was fatally shot in June while asleep in his Kansas City home, is a development of Operation Relentless Pursuit which targeted many of these same cities last year as part of a quasi-occupation of working class neighborhoods by federal agents in conjunction with local police and district attorneys.

Contrary to what Trump says, Operation Legend has been warmly embraced by the Democratic political leadership in the targeted cities, including by mayors, police chiefs and district attorneys. During a Tuesday press conference in the Democratic stronghold of Detroit as he did also in Kansas City the next day, Barr stated that the nine cities currently targeted were chosen because “there’s strong police departments with strong leadership, mayors that back the police, where we thought we could increase our efforts, and have an impact on crime.”

US District Attorney Matthew Schneider agreed with Barr that federal intervention into major cities was nothing new, stating, “I did this back when I was an

assistant US attorney and my boss was President Barack Obama; we’ve been working with state and local partners for decades. ... The difference is, we’re doing more of it, and it’s more effective.”

Operation Legend, like Pursuit before it, involves flooding major cash-strapped cities with millions of dollars earmarked for police use only, which includes hiring more officers, purchasing enhanced surveillance equipment and expanding federal “task-forces” composed of agents from the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) in each city.

Barr confirmed in his press conference that over 1,000 agents from the DEA, ATF and FBI are now “embedded” in police units in the nine cities targeted, which include Kansas City and St. Louis in Missouri; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Chicago, Illinois; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Cleveland, Ohio; Memphis, Tennessee and Indianapolis, Indiana.

Some of these agents are embedded as part of temporary operations while others are being permanently assigned. Barr confirmed that embedded agents are working “shoulder to shoulder ... I mean literally shoulder to shoulder” with local police, including in so-called “assault squads.” Barr refused to state how long the operation would last, stating “as long as we are making arrests, we’ll be here.”

During Wednesday’s conference he touted the supposed efficacy of Operation Legend, claiming to have arrested 91 people wanted for homicide-related charges. Barr boasted that federal “task forces” working in conjunction with local police had seized over 400 guns as images of the weapons allegedly seized as a result of the operation flashed on television screens behind him.

The images included crudely modified semi-automatic rifles, six-shooters, extended magazines and an assortment of pistols, nothing more lethal than could be found in any of the armories of thousands of police stations, patrol cars or in unmarked police vans rolling through working class neighborhoods and urban cities at this very moment. Similar weaponry will likely be delivered to departments as part of the continued “infusion” of federal assets into local departments.

“Operation Legend is the heart of the federal government’s response to this upturn in violent crime,” Barr said. “Its mission is to save lives, solve crimes and take violent offenders off the streets before they can claim more victims.”

Of the nearly 1,500 arrests made, 217 have been charged with federal crimes, a vast majority of which are for felony possession of firearms, narcotics or for distribution of narcotics. Barr stressed throughout the conference, and in subsequent promotional stops in the cities taking part in the program such as in Cleveland and Detroit, that part of the benefit of charging suspects with a federal crime is that it allows for longer sentences. Also defendants are rarely released from pretrial detention, in essence allowing the legally innocent to be held in detention until their trial, without bail, regardless of the evidence against them.

As with Relentless Pursuit, Barr attempted to blame increasing homicide rates as a justification for the increased federal occupation. At the time Barr first made these claims last year, almost every major crime that the FBI kept statistics for was in decline.

And while there has been an uptick in violent crime, especially beginning at the end of May 2020 and throughout the summer, Barr cited without a shred of evidence that the increase in homicides was due to “pent up aggression” as a result of state and local quarantine orders.

He also hypothesized that the “premature release of dangerous criminals by the courts,” coupled with popular demands to “defund the police” had also led to a spike in crime.

His supposed solution, as his own statistics show, has done little to curb violent crime. Nearly all of the cities, which received federal funding and agents since last year, recorded dramatic increases in violent crimes. The only exception was Albuquerque.

It is no coincidence that working class cities suffering

double-digit unemployment rates, mass hunger, homelessness and increasing COVID-19 fatalities, all social problems with their root cause in the capitalist system, have likewise seen an uptick in homicides. Millions are pushed into increasingly desperate situations, while an indifferent ruling class ignores demands for more income, housing, food, health care, and safe workplaces and schools.

During the press conference, Barr sought to further clarify the difference between Operation Legend and the federal occupation of cities by Department of Homeland Security agents, such as BORTAC in Portland, Oregon, or “Special Response Teams” which were held in reserve in Seattle, Washington.

“There has been a lot of confusion in the media, some of it not unintentional, conflating two different aspects of law enforcement,” Barr said. “One is dealing with civil unrest, rioting, and the other is the classical traditional work that law enforcement does.”

He refused to elaborate what part of “classical traditional work” he was engaged in this past Tuesday, along with District Attorney Schneider and Detroit Police Chief James Craig. After a morning press conference, the three met at ATF headquarters where they were briefed, with reporters specifically out of earshot, before proceeding to take flight over the city in a US Army UH72 Lakota helicopter.

When a *Detroit News* reporter asked about the purpose of the trip, Craig responded it was “for something else I can’t tell you about.” Schneider likewise refused to discuss the nature of the trip to reporters, saying, “It was a law enforcement matter (involving the operation) which the Attorney General was able to observe; that’s all I can say about it.”



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