

Trump's Operation Legend prepares local police forces to suppress opposition

Alex Findijs

28 September 2020

As Trump lays the grounds for a coup d'état in the event he loses the November 3 presidential election, the United States Department of Justice's (DOJ) Operation Legend approaches its third month of activity in cities across the country. The operation—named after LeGenD Taliferro, a four-year-old boy killed in June by a stray bullet in Kansas City, Missouri—has seen the deployment of hundreds of federal agents and millions of dollars in funding to local police departments to aid in the suppression of protests against police violence.

The operation has been presented by the Trump administration as a means of helping beleaguered police departments crack down on a rise in violent crime. However, this is only a cover for the funneling of more federal money and personnel primarily into the local police departments of nine major cities across the country: Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; Baltimore, Maryland; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Cleveland, Ohio; Indianapolis, Indiana; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Memphis, Tennessee; and Kansas City, Missouri.

The influx of funds for expanding police departments and their equipment has been considerable:

- In Cleveland, the DOJ's Bureau of Justice Assistance provided \$1 million to Operation Legend activities and the Community Oriented Policing Service Office made \$10 million available to the Cleveland Police Department to fund the hiring of 30 officers, five Ohio State Highway Patrol troopers, and four Adult Parole Authority officers.

- The Detroit Police Department was provided \$2.4 million for the hiring of 15 officers and issued \$1.4 million for the operation.

- The police departments of Milwaukee, Wauwatosa and Cudahy, Wisconsin, were provided \$10.2 million to hire 29 new officers and \$1.9 million to support

Operation Legend.

The money that is being provided far outstrips the expected costs of these hirings alone. The rest of the money that is being provided to cities is intended for a vast expansion of the repressive tools of the state, including upgrading crowd control equipment and the development of surveillance operations.

In Memphis, Tennessee a video has surfaced this week of sheriff's deputies wielding taser riot shields, reportedly purchased through funding from Operation Legend.

The cities of Memphis and Detroit have also expanded their surveillance capabilities since the launch of Operation Legend. According to a report from the *Intercept*, Memphis signed a contract with the Israeli company Cellebrite, which is famous for its technology that can hack and extract data from smart phones. This purchase was made on August 2, just two days before federal agents arrived in the city. Two weeks later, Detroit also purchased a plan from Cellebrite for its "premium" software package at a cost of \$100,000.

In Chicago, where over 100 federal agents have been deployed through the operation, it was announced on August 14 that the city was implementing a new "around the clock" monitoring program using social media to identify looters.

Additionally, five cities—Memphis, Cleveland, Albuquerque, Milwaukee and Detroit—will receive money from Operation Legend to implement gunshot detection technology. The surveillance system, pioneered by company ShotSpotter, uses microphones placed in neighborhoods to detect the sound and location of gun shots. The possibility that this technology could be expanded to track protesters and monitor workers is not out of the question.

Operation Legend is a significant component of Trump's scheming, but it is only part of a broader move to militarize and federalize the police launched in December of 2019 under Operation Relentless Pursuit (ORP).

ORP was announced by Attorney General William Barr with the stated goal of combating crime in America's most violent cities. More accurately, it was intended to lay the groundwork for advanced police repression and greater federal police presence on the ground.

Many of the same cities that have been targeted under Operation Legend were also the focus of ORP. A considerable \$71 million was allocated to be distributed in grants to cities for the purpose of purchasing new equipment and technology as well as increasing the size of local police forces and financing "federally deputized task force officers." In addition to these grants, Trump stated during a meeting with International Association of Chiefs of Police in 2019 that he had made \$600 million worth of surplus military equipment available for local law enforcement agencies.

A critical aspect of both of these operations has been their deployment to Democratic-led cities that approved the allocation of federal agents and funds under Trump's plan. This is a significant exposure of the Democratic Party and its false claims of opposition to Trump.

In fact, the Democrats have welcomed the deployment of federal police agents with open arms. Many of these programs, particularly the distribution of military equipment to local law enforcement, were enabled by the Obama administration which also provided military-style equipment to local police forces and aided local police departments in suppressing protests against police violence.

All opposition to Trump and his authoritarian maneuvers is being channeled behind the presidential campaign of former Vice President Joe Biden, a similarly reactionary character who splits from Trump on tactics alone, particularly when it comes to foreign policy regarding Russia and China. Towards this end the Democrats are working to prevent the mass mobilization of the working class against Trump out of fear that it will challenge the interests of the financial oligarchy.

Operation Legend, and the complicity of the Democrats in enabling it, is a dire warning of the political repression that is being prepared by both parties in the lead up to and aftermath of the election. Only the political mobilization of the working class in the fight for socialism can defeat Trump's plotting and the descent of the United States in the direction of fascism.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact