

Trump administration deputized hundreds of federal officers during crackdown on protesters

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Documents released by the US Marshals Service (USMS) confirm that the Trump administration conducted a nationwide program to deputize hundreds of federal agents during its crackdown on protesters last summer and fall. In many cases, those deputized were local police officers.

The documents reveal that the deputations under Operation Legend—launched by the US Justice Department on July 8, 2020 and promoted as a force for fighting crime in major US cities—were expedited across the country at the height of the protests against police violence triggered by the murder of George Floyd.

The nonprofit watchdog group American Oversight obtained the documents—533 pages of internal email messages and “Special Deputation Oath of Office” forms—through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. While Trump’s Attorney General William Barr reported last December that 6,000 people had been arrested by Operation Legend agents, the USMS has yet to provide American Oversight with the arrest data it is seeking as part of the FOIA request.

A report published by American Oversight on Thursday says the records it obtained “provide details about where many of the deputations took place as the program, which began in Kansas City, Mo., expanded to other cities. Deputation forms included in the records contain details about the officer’s parent law enforcement agency, where they made their oath of office, and the length of their deputation.”

While the names of the officers and the representatives of the sponsoring local agency are redacted from the forms, the records show 24 deputation oaths signed in Kansas City, 25 signed in

Chicago, 15 signed in St. Louis, 38 signed in Milwaukee. The American Oversight report states, “The highest number of deputations in the records occurred in Albuquerque, with 58 oaths signed on Sept. 4 and Sept. 16. In some cases, the deputations were set to last months. In others, such as those involving the Milwaukee Police Department, the deputations appear to only extend for days or weeks.”

The internal email messages—also with identities of the individuals involved redacted—show that those submitting the oath documents were eager to get the deputations approved. For example, a representative of the Great Lakes Regional Fugitive Task Force (GLRFTF), with offices in Chicago and Hammond, Indiana, submitted a group of applications on July 23 to the USMS Special Deputations Branch saying, “the sooner we can get this back the better” because the “operation started Wed.”

An email from a USMS investigative analyst from the District of New Mexico requested a fast-track approval of deputation applications: “Please be advised that this is for Operation Legend. Please expedite.”

The American Oversight report explains that Operation Legend—which fraudulently exploited the death of four-year-old LeGenD Taliferro, who was shot and killed while sleeping in his home in Kansas City, Missouri, on June 29, 2020—was essentially a rebranding of a previous USMS program called Operation Relentless Pursuit (ORP) that was launched by the Justice Department in December 2019 to “surge federal law enforcement resources into seven of America’s most violent cities.”

The actual purpose of the ORP program was to further then-President Trump’s reelection campaign

“law and order” message. Once the protests against police violence began, following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, the Trump agenda shifted to a campaign against the protesters.

The American Oversight report explains that the federal deputization of officers was used to bring “increased federal charges against defendants” and that USMS task forces “often operate without the same oversight measures that may generally be required by local jurisdictions.” As was the case in the killing of Michael Reinhoehl on September 3 in Lacey, Washington, agents from the FBI and USMS Pacific Northwest Violent Offender Task Force were mobilized by the Trump administration to execute the Portland protester in a hail of gunshots in complete violation of his constitutional rights.

In February, the criminal justice investigative journalism organization the Marshall Project published a report reviewing violence by federal marshals or deputized police officers in USMS task forces between January 1, 2015 and September 10, 2020. This report shows that 177 people were shot by these groups, 124 of whom died. The Marshall Project reported that federal officers shot 31 people a year and killed 22, a number greater than city police forces of similar sizes.

The Operation Legend program also took place alongside of the deployment by the Trump administration of paramilitary forces such as the Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC) of the Department of Homeland Security against protesters in cities such as Portland. As reported by the *World Socialist Web Site*, in July at least seven people were kidnapped by militarized camouflaged DHS agents driving unmarked vehicles and held for hours in unknown locations without cause or due process.

The expansion of federal agents operating in major US cities in violation of the US Constitution was part and parcel of the attack waged by the Trump administration on democratic rights and the attempt to establish a personalist dictatorship in the White House. This campaign reached a high point in June when Trump threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807 seeking to mobilize active US troops against peaceful protesters in Washington D.C., and culminated in the assault on the US Capitol on January 6 by a fascist mob attempting to overturn the outcome of the 2020 presidential elections.

The increasing militarization of the police and the slandering of protests as “violent riots” by the right wing has been aided and abetted all along by the Democrats, who have endorsed the use of federal police in major cities under the guise of “fighting crime.” Throughout the summer, as Trump and Barr were mobilizing newly deputized federal agents, Democratic Party mayors Lori Lightfoot in Chicago and Mike Duggan in Detroit, for example, vouched for the White House and said that they needed the help.



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