

ICE plans to spend up to \$2 million on robot dogs for immigration raids

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Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is preparing to spend as much as \$2 million on Spot, the four-legged robot built by Boston Dynamics, for use in immigration raids, according to federal procurement documents reported this week by 404 Media and the *Boston Globe*. The deal will see the machine made famous by a decade of viral marketing videos repurposed as a tool for terrorizing immigrant workers and their families.

ICE says the robots will be used for “situational awareness” and “hazard assessment,” scouting buildings with cameras and chemical sensors before armed agents move in. An ICE spokesperson insisted the machines “will not make arrests” and are intended to “improve officer safety.” Boston Dynamics, for its part, issued the same boilerplate reassurance it has offered every time its machines have turned up in the hands of police departments over the past six years: the robots are “used to keep people out of harm’s way” and “any attempted weaponization of Boston Dynamics’ robots is strictly prohibited.”

These are the words of a company that has spent the last four years trying, with limited success, to launder its image after a history as a Pentagon-funded weapons laboratory. They should be treated with the contempt they deserve.

The planned purchase is only the latest addition to an arsenal the Trump administration has been assembling for ICE with terrifying speed. On top of the roughly \$75 billion the agency received through last year’s “One Big Beautiful Bill,” Congress voted the agency a further \$38 billion in June through the Secure America Act, a \$70 billion supplemental package funding ICE and CBP through 2029—passed, like its predecessor, with the indispensable political collaboration of the Democratic Party.

As the WSWs has reported, ICE is separately spending on CTG-5 “electric-shock torture gloves,” devices capable of delivering up to 362 volts through an agent’s palm, whose manufacturer’s own manual warns it “may cause or contribute to death or serious injury.” The same devices, sold under the brand name G.L.O.V.E., have already been used by police against schoolchildren in Omaha, including a student in a special-education program.

ICE’s interest in robotics is not new. The agency paid \$78,000 for a Mini-CALIBER “tactical robot” from ICOR Technology in September 2025, months before the current funding surge. All three acquisitions were made or planned as noncompetitive, sole-source procurements, shielding them from the scrutiny that even routine government purchases are supposed to receive.

Boston Dynamics likes to present itself today as a plucky engineering firm building robots for warehouses and construction sites. This is a recent and calculated reinvention. For the first two decades of its existence, the company was primarily a Pentagon-funded military robotics contractor.

Founded in 1992 as a spinoff of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Leg Laboratory, Boston Dynamics built its reputation and much of its early business on funding from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). BigDog, developed during the 2000s, was designed as a robotic pack mule to carry ammunition and supplies for US infantry over terrain impassable to wheeled vehicles. The program was shelved only because the machine’s gasoline engine was judged too loud for combat.

Its successor, the Legged Squad Support System, was built explicitly for the Marine Corps and could follow voice commands from a squad on patrol. PETMAN was a humanoid robot designed to test protective clothing under simulated chemical warfare conditions. Military research was not a sideline. It was the company’s core business.

Google acquired Boston Dynamics in 2013 but began seeking a buyer by 2016 after concluding that the company was unlikely to become profitable in the near term. It agreed to sell Boston Dynamics to SoftBank in June 2017.

The sale did not represent a retreat by Google from military work. Three months later, Google secured a contract for Project Maven, a Pentagon program that applied machine learning to drone and surveillance footage. When employees learned of the contract, internal opposition erupted, culminating in a petition signed by thousands of workers and Google’s eventual decision not to renew it.

Under SoftBank, Spot entered a limited leasing program in 2019 and went on general sale in 2020. Boston Dynamics has been controlled by Hyundai Motor Group since 2021, when Hyundai acquired an 80 percent stake in a deal valuing the company at \$1.1 billion. In July, Hyundai announced that it was pursuing the acquisition of SoftBank’s remaining 9.65 percent stake.

Boston Dynamics has repeatedly attempted to present itself as something other than what its engineering history demonstrates. These efforts have repeatedly collided with the actual uses of its technology.

When the New York Police Department deployed a Spot unit nicknamed “Digidog” in 2020 and 2021, the backlash was severe

enough that the department terminated its lease early. Mayor Eric Adams publicly revived the program in 2023, announcing that the NYPD would acquire two of the robots.

In February 2021, the prankster collective MSCHF mounted a paintball gun on a Spot unit, demonstrating in the crudest possible terms that the platform could be adapted to carry a weapon. A rival manufacturer, Ghost Robotics, removed any doubt about the industry's trajectory later that year when it exhibited a quadruped robot carrying a sniper rifle at the Association of the United States Army's annual conference.

In October 2022, stung by these episodes, Boston Dynamics organized an open letter, co-signed by five other robotics firms, pledging not to "weaponize" its general-purpose robots. As recently as May of this year, according to Semafor, the company's own workforce forced it to cancel a sale to a police equipment supplier that planned to mount flash-bang grenades on Spot units for use against "barricaded suspects," after employees invoked the case of a toddler critically injured by a flash-bang device during a police raid. The episode shows that the only thing standing between the company's technology and open weaponization has been the actions of its own employees, not any technical or corporate safeguard.

Reports on the ICE contract have been careful to note that the machines "will not be able to attack people." This formulation conflates a policy with a fact. Boston Dynamics' prohibition on weaponization is written into its terms of service and end-user license agreement—a contractual promise, enforced, at best, by the threat of cutting off software updates or refusing future sales. It is not a property of the hardware.

Spot ships with an open software development kit (SDK) that allows customers to program custom behaviors and control its actuators, and with a standardized mounting rail built precisely so that customers can attach their own payloads—cameras, sensors, robotic arms, or weapons. Nothing in the robot's engineering makes this impossible. The defense contractor Ghost Robotics has already shown a four-legged robot platform carrying a rifle to a Pentagon audience. Owners of the rival Unitree quadruped have had their machines' manufacturer-installed "kill switches" defeated by hackers. The barrier between the sensor-equipped Spot units ICE says it is buying today and an armed version tomorrow is a piece of paper.

Civil liberties advocates have warned of the more immediate danger. Jenn Rolnick Borchetta, deputy project director on policing at the American Civil Liberties Union, called the technology "a recipe for harm" even in its advertised, unarmed form. It normalizes remote and less-accountable forms of coercion against people who may have no way of knowing who is operating the device or why.

Matthew Guariglia, a senior policy analyst at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, warned that sending a robot in ahead of agents removes even the minimal restraint that comes from an officer facing personal risk.

"They might be willing to be more reckless with raids on individuals' homes if the first person through to kick the door is a robot, not a human," he told the *Boston Globe*.

The development of these repressive technologies is not confined

to immigration enforcement. The forces being wielded against immigrants today are being developed for use against the entire working class. The same shock gloves being purchased for ICE agents are already being used by police against schoolchildren. The same class of quadruped robotics platforms marketed as benign construction tools has been displayed at military trade shows with sniper rifles mounted on their backs.

The financing for this repression could not have been secured without the political collaboration of the Democratic Party. After the murders of Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti triggered mass opposition to Trump's deportation operation, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and the Democrats separated funding for ICE and Border Patrol from the rest of the Department of Homeland Security.

The Democrats voted to fund every other component of the department while securing no binding restrictions on the immigration police. This cleared the way for Republicans to provide ICE and Border Patrol with tens of billions of dollars through the budget reconciliation process, which required only a simple majority in the Senate.

At the same time, the Democrats worked to demobilize the protests and suppress demands for a general strike. Individual Democrats now denounce the agency's tactics before television cameras even as their leadership helped ensure that the money continued to flow.

When Democratic Representatives Bennie Thompson, Lou Correa and Shri Thanedar asked DHS to halt the glove procurement, their letter confined itself to oversight of equipment while leaving fully intact the mass-deportation operation for which the devices are intended.

The deployment of robot dogs equipped with cameras and chemical sensors to scout homes and workplaces ahead of armed immigration agents is a further stage in the militarization of an agency that already snatches workers off the street, holds children in cages, and deports people to third countries with records of torture.

Boston Dynamics' reassurances that its machines will not be "weaponized" are worth as much as every other corporate promise made to a public that is expected to trust that capitalism's instruments of repression will be used responsibly. History—and the company's own engineering department—offers no such guarantee.



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