



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on September 19, 2020

Operation Legend: DOJ Sends Agents and Money to Cities to Increase Surveillance

Operation Legend is the latest federal policy aimed at converting local police into administrative agents of the federal surveillance state.

Agents of the U.S. Justice Department are being deployed throughout cities — seven at current count — throughout the country, assigned to assist local law enforcement in the installation and use of powerful surveillance technology, all of which will be financed with federal funds.



Operation Legend is tasked with equipping target cities with the kind of advanced surveillance apparatuses that local governments on their own could not afford. As reported by *The Guardian*:

Operation Legend and its December precursor, Operation Relentless Pursuit, are both funding surveillance technology in cities across the country. Through Operation Legend, Memphis and four other cities received grants for gunshot detection technology, which lines cities with sensors to detect gunfire, despite longstanding concerns about its efficacy. Other more opaque grants from the Justice Department, like a \$1.4 million grant to Shelby County, which surrounds Memphis, in April and a \$1 million grant in July to the city of Cleveland, are to be used in part for “technological solutions” or “support” for investigations.

Awash in these federal funds, cities have doubled down on their surveillance investments, even as they face general budget shortfalls in the tens of millions. On August 4, two days before Operation Legend was formally announced in the city, Memphis signed a new contract with Cellebrite, an Israeli forensics manufacturer popular with law enforcement, whose products can hack and extract data from smartphones. The estimated \$65,000 contract would double previous annual spending on the technology, per city procurement records. The Memphis police declined an interview request for this story and did not respond to several additional inquiries about the purchases.

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Grants in the millions are making cities like Memphis, Detroit, and St. Louis mere satrapies of the federal law enforcement authority, headed by U.S. Attorney General William Barr.

At an appearance in Memphis last November, AG Barr declared his department’s intent to enforce federal gun regulations “with a vengeance.”

It appears that Operation Legend will augment the AG’s ability to enforce unconstitutional federal gun restrictions by putting the power of unavoidable surveillance at the federal government’s disposal.

The story in *The Guardian* reports that the Justice Department agents assigned to the various Operation Legend cities are scheduled to leave in November, but “they will leave behind a city flush with grant money for local police — and heightened surveillance capabilities.”

After Memphis, Detroit was given enough federal cash to purchase the premium package from



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Cellebrite; this payment alone amounts to three times the expenditures of 2018 and 2019.

Not to be outdone, Chicago announced that it would “employ ‘enhanced’ technology for ‘around-the-clock’ monitoring of social media,” something that would be unthinkable without the willing largesse of the federal government.

The Guardian highlighted the deployment of “one hundred federal agents from the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosive” as part of Operation Legend.” Once again, subordinating local law enforcement to the Leviathan in D.C.

There is a 1978 city ordinance in Memphis that prohibits police from collecting “political intelligence.” That ordinance has encouraged Memphis to become dependent on the feds to do what the Memphis police are prohibited from doing. As reported in *The Guardian*:

“Memphis Police Director Michael Rallings has alluded to partnering with the FBI to get around some of the decree’s restrictions, later confirming through a city spokesperson that he ‘told [federal officials] that we are restricted by the consent decree and depend on them to catch threats articulated on social media.’”

Finally, as Operation Legend expands into new territory, the city of Indianapolis will see federal agencies contribute “not just manpower, but technology that can help identify and arrest the individuals. And then they have access to federal courts.”

This blurring of the lines between state, local, and federal authority is anathema to the principle of federalism upon which the U.S. Constitution is built. Operation Legend and the multitude of similarly aimed federal programs are the piecemeal accomplishment of the consolidation that was feared by many prudent patriots at the time of the ratification debates in 1787-1788.

I will close with this warning spoken by Patrick Henry, a prediction that seems all the more likely to be brought to pass in light of Operation Legend and the federal plan to purchase the control of cities.

On June 5, 1788, Patrick Henry declared:

If we admit this consolidated government, it will be because we like a great, splendid one. Some way or other we must be a great and mighty empire....

When the American spirit was in its youth, the language of America was different: liberty, sir, was then the primary object....

But now, sir, the American spirit, assisted by the ropes and chains of consolidation, is about to convert this country into a powerful and mighty empire. If you make the citizens of this country agree to become the subjects of one great consolidated empire of America, your government will not have sufficient energy to keep them together.

Such a government is incompatible with the genius of republicanism. There will be no checks, no real balances, in this government.

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