

Obama plans deployment of troops, drones along US-Mexico border

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In the course of an overnight visit to Texas, US President Barack Obama declared that he would be “happy” to entertain the prospect of deploying National Guard troops on the state’s border with Mexico to deal with the influx of Central American immigrants, the vast majority of them children, fleeing death squads, gang violence and poverty in their home countries.

Obama was speaking after a closed-door meeting with Texas Governor Rick Perry, a right-wing Republican, who pressed him to send 1,000 National Guard troops to the Rio Grande and deploy more Predator surveillance drones to monitor the border. Obama “indicated that he had not ruled out such measures,” according to press reports, adding, in a public comment, “We’re happy to consider how we could deploy the National Guard down there, but that’s a temporary solution.”

What Obama presented as a longer-term solution was the buildup of the entire apparatus of state repression—Border Patrol, immigrant courts, detention facilities, deportation flights—directed against children and their mothers seeking to escape appalling conditions. He boasted that fully half the \$3.7 billion he formally requested Tuesday from Congress would go to this expanded police repression, while half would be required to feed, clothe and shelter the immigrants during the period of time between their apprehension and their deportation.

Both the president and leading congressional Democrats and Republicans have declared themselves in favor of revising a 2008 law that bars the immediate repatriation of immigrants detained at border crossings if they are not citizens of the two neighboring countries, Canada and Mexico. This law, passed by near-unanimous votes under the Bush administration as a measure against child sex trafficking, prevents the

Immigration and Customs Enforcement from turning back child immigrants from Central America. By law, they must be processed in ICE facilities before they can be returned to their home countries or released in the care of relatives resident in the United States.

Obama’s response to the humanitarian crisis on the border, with more than 90,000 children and mothers swamping US detention facilities, is a combination of indifference and repression. The president came to Texas not to address the crisis, but to raise money for the Democratic Party from millionaire businessmen. He made no public speeches and rejected pleas to visit the border area in person, instead appearing at three private fundraising events, where he made only perfunctory reference to the immigration issue.

As the *National Journal* noted in its report on the Obama fundraising swing, “Obama spent little time dwelling on the huddled masses at the border, most of whom, he assured, would soon be sent packing.”

A front-page report in the *New York Times* Thursday gives a glimpse of the social conditions in Central America that have propelled the wave of immigrant refugees. It describes conditions in San Pedro Sula, the city in Honduras with the highest homicide rate in the world. More than 2,200 children from that single city have arrived in the US between January and May this year. (Not coincidentally, although the *Times* makes no mention of it, San Pedro Sula is only a few miles from Soto Cano, the main US military base in the region).

The Obama-Perry meeting was symbolic and politically significant. Obama described their conversation as “constructive” and said that “the bottom line is, actually, that there’s nothing that the Governor indicated he’d like to see that I have a philosophical objection to.”

He urged the Texas governor to intercede with the

state's heavily Republican congressional delegation to support the \$3.7 billion supplemental anti-immigrant measure unveiled on Tuesday. At a press briefing afterwards, Obama said that he offered Perry a quid pro quo: "If the Texas delegation said, for us to pass the supplemental we want to include a commitment that you're going to send some National Guard early, we'd be happy to consider it."

Obama said Perry pressed him to revise the deployment of Border Patrol units in south Texas. "He was concerned about how many patrol agents were directly at the border," Obama said. "He was concerned that some of the positioning of Border Patrol agents is too far from the border to be effective in deterring folks from coming in as opposed to simply apprehending them. I indicated to him that what he said sounded like it made sense."

Obama went on to celebrate the horrific toll of repression and suffering imposed on immigrants by his administration. "Right now, there are more Border Patrol agents and surveillance resources on the ground than at any time in our history," he said. "And we deport almost 400,000 migrants each year."

Congressional Republican leaders have denounced the supplemental appropriations bill proposed by Obama Tuesday, demanding far more sweeping action both against the immigrants themselves, and against the countries from which they come.

Texas Republican Congressman Randy Weber introduced legislation to cut off foreign aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico until they take action to halt the flow of migrant children. Other Republicans have introduced bills to halt aid to Mexico until the border is "secure," to finish the 700-mile southwest border fence and hire 6,000 more Border Patrol agents, and to deploy the National Guard on any state's border with Mexico at the request of the governor of that state.

Perry emerged from the meeting with Obama demanding that Obama order the National Guard in without bothering to consult the state governors. He told Fox News, "Mr. President, you can deal with this. You can unilaterally direct the Department of Defense to put those troops on the border... The president needs to understand that the single most important thing that he can do is put the National Guard on the border to coordinate with local law enforcement, with state law

enforcement, with the border patrol."



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