

US Homeland Security memo: Deploy 100,000 National Guard troops to round up immigrants

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The Associated Press on Friday published a memo by the Trump administration's Homeland Security secretary, retired Gen. John Kelly, proposing the deployment of 100,000 National Guard troops to carry out the president's January 25 executive order mandating an escalation of the detention and deportation of undocumented immigrants.

The front page of the 11-page memo reads "From: John Kelly." It recommends that the governors of 11 states in the South and along the Pacific Coast be instructed to mobilize their state National Guards for the purpose of "perform[ing] the functions of an immigration officer in relation to the investigation, apprehension, and detention of aliens in the United States."

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer said the AP report was "irresponsible" and "100 percent not true." But only hours later, a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) told AP anonymously that the document existed and had been drawn up by the DHS.

Spicer then claimed that it was "not a White House document," and DHS sources said the memo was not presented to President Trump. Spicer added that there was presently "no effort at all to utilize the National Guard to round up unauthorized immigrants."

However, Spicer did not deny that the memo was discussed within the Trump administration as a possible course of action. Nor did he state that its proposals would not be considered in the future.

This date of the Kelly memo is January 25, and its first sentence declares its purpose to be the implementation of a January 20 executive order. Since no immigration executive order was issued on January 20, inauguration day, it is likely that Kelly's memo was a response to an earlier draft of the anti-immigrant executive order that was announced and signed by Trump on January 25. This would indicate that Kelly's proposal was discussed prior to the issuance of the final order on January 25.

If implemented, the memorandum would require the de facto if not de jure imposition of martial law in cities as far north as Portland, Oregon and as far east as New Orleans, Louisiana.

Under the terms of the memorandum, the National Guard could be deployed to all states that touch the Mexican border, as well as the states adjoining those border states. In all, these include Oregon, California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, Colorado, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana.

The fact that such a memo would even be submitted and discussed at the highest levels of the government is a warning to the entire working class, native-born as well as immigrant. It lifts the veil on preparations for state violence on a massive scale to suppress domestic opposition to the ruling class' policies of war and social reaction.

Though the memorandum does not include specific instructions on how deportations are to be carried out, the proposal to deploy 100,000 soldiers across 11 states makes clear that what is being prepared is a crackdown of unprecedented scope and brutality. In his election campaign, Trump pledged to deport at least 3 million undocumented immigrants, mainly from Mexico and Latin America.

The executive order issued on January 25 calls for a huge buildup of the border patrol, the construction of new detention centers near the Mexican border, the construction of a wall along the entirety of the border, and an expansion of the dragnet to include virtually all undocumented immigrants. Already last week, extensive raids were carried out around the country resulting in the detention and deportation of hundreds of workers.

President Obama earned the nickname "deporter in chief" for overseeing the deportation of more people than all previous presidents combined. Trump plans to put his criminal policy in the shade. The *Los Angeles Times* has estimated that the January 25 order makes some 8 million undocumented workers subject to deportation.

Kelly's proposal entails a military operation of wartime proportions. In terms of savagery and scale, the operation would far surpass the imposition of the pre-Civil War Fugitive Slave Act and the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War Two.

Armed military detachments would likely set up barricades and checkpoints in working class districts. Those trying to

escape to states outside the zones of deployment would be hunted down and jailed.

Entire sections of Los Angeles, Houston, Phoenix, Denver, San Diego and other cities would be placed under military occupation. Heavily armed soldiers would go house-to-house, breaking down doors and dragging immigrants away from their families. The thousands or perhaps millions targeted by the raids would be sent to internment camps where they would be detained indefinitely or processed for expulsion from the country.

The deployment of the National Guard would also serve to suppress protests against deportations, which have grown in recent weeks and spread to cities large and small. A precedent was set by Obama, under whom governors of both parties deployed the National Guard to quell protests in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 and Baltimore, Maryland in 2015.

Whatever their tactical differences, the Democrats are complicit in Trump's immigration policy. Democratic senators overwhelmingly supported Kelly's confirmation, voting 37-11 in favor. Senator Bernie Sanders defended his support for Kelly by proclaiming his hope that Kelly "will have a moderating influence on some of the racist and xenophobic views that President Trump advocated throughout the campaign." He made this statement five days before Kelly wrote the leaked memo.

Kelly's memorandum also proposes to eliminate the right to a court hearing for hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of migrants. It calls for an expansion of expedited removal proceedings to include a broad category of undocumented migrants who cannot affirmatively show that they have lived in the United States for two years. Under such proceedings, the right to appear before a judge before deportation is dispensed with. The memo claims eliminating the right to due process is necessary because of an "unacceptable delay" in the deportation process caused by the backlog of removal cases currently pending in immigration court.

In addition, the memo proposes to send migrants back to the country through which they entered the US (almost always Mexico) while they wait for the multi-year court process to play out. These migrants would be denied the right to appear in court and be allowed to attend only "via video conference." This would result in the abrogation of almost all due process rights, which attach to undocumented migrants only when they are on US soil.

The Kelly memo also attacks asylum seekers who are escaping from war, poverty and violence caused by decades of US imperialist plunder. The memo claims that "the asylum process is rife with fraud and abuse," and that asylum officers should release applicants from detention only if "the alien has a significant possibility of establishing eligibility for asylum, based on established legal authority," an arbitrary standard that will be difficult for migrants to prove, especially without an attorney present. The memo also proposes to drastically reduce

the social services available for unaccompanied youth migrants who make the difficult trek across the Southern desert by themselves, often at a very young age.

These proposals did not emerge in a historical vacuum. They have been prepared over years in which both the Democratic and Republican parties have spearheaded a ruthless assault on immigrants. It was President Clinton who signed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 into law, while denouncing "the problem of illegal immigration." All leading Democrats supported the Secure Fences Act of 2006, including senators Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, Charles Schumer and Joseph Biden.

In the course of more than 15 years of the war on terror, the American ruling class has sought to whip up a climate of xenophobia in an attempt to divide the working class and justify its imperialist wars around the world. The wave of protests against Trump's war on immigrants shows that this campaign has not succeeded in winning significant popular support, and that a large majority of working Americans retain a deep commitment to democratic rights.

However, the defense of the rights of immigrants—and the democratic rights of the working class as a whole—requires that the entire reactionary framework of the official debate on immigration policy be rejected. Both Trump and his establishment critics, Republicans and Democrats, take the position that so-called "illegal" immigrants are criminals and that foreign-born workers must be prevented from entering the country by means of militarized borders and armies of border police.

The working class must uphold the right of all workers to live and work in the country of their choice with full citizenship rights, including the right to work and travel without fear of deportation or repression. The slogan must be open borders and the unity of workers, immigrant and native-born, in a common struggle against the capitalist system, which is the source of poverty, racism and oppression.



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