

Immigration agents destroy humanitarian water supplies along US-Mexico border

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Even as Democrats and Republicans work toward a right-wing immigration deal that will further militarize the US-Mexico border, a new report sheds light on the criminal outcome of the bipartisan, decades-long efforts to prevent immigrants from reaching the United States.

The report, published on January 18, reveals that for years, US border agents have systematically emptied hundreds of emergency water supplies left behind by humanitarian organizations for immigrants along the desert region of the US-Mexico border.

According to government statistics, more than 7,200 people have died attempting the journey through the four states bordering Mexico—Texas, New Mexico, California and Arizona—over the last two decades, the majority due to exposure to the elements, including dehydration. Even this figure significantly understates the real toll. A recent *USA Today* investigation revealed that the actual number killed in the past five years is between 25 and 300 percent higher due to government underreporting. Many of those whose deaths go unreported are thrown into mass unmarked graves.

The recent investigative report, titled “Interference with Humanitarian Aid,” was produced by two nonprofit groups, No More Deaths and La Coalición de Derechos Humanos (Human Rights Coalition), based in Tucson, Arizona. Between 2012 and 2015, the years covered by their investigation, No More Deaths placed more than 31,558 gallon jugs (120,000 liters) of water in southern migration trails in the Arivaca corridor, a roughly 800-square-mile region in the Arizona desert that is a common route for migrants seeking to evade heavily militarized border systems.

The groups found through follow-up checks that more than 86 percent of the water had been drunk. At least 3,586 gallon jugs of water, however, had been deliberately destroyed in 415 separate instances, or

more than twice per week on average. The scale of sabotage demonstrates that it could only have been the outcome of a deliberate and systematic strategy.

The authors note that, in addition to government agents, hunters and small extreme right-wing militia may also sabotage the water supplies. However, they explain: “Given the scope of destruction, we conclude that the only actors with a sufficiently large and consistent presence across a sufficiently wide area of the desert, during periods when hunting is both authorized and prohibited, are agents of the US Border Patrol.”

Their conclusion is supported by a video, recently released by No More Deaths, showing smirking border agents as they empty and kick over jugs of water in the desert. The video, which includes four incidents captured on camera between 2010 and 2017, has already been viewed more than 14 million times on Facebook.

The report notes that the journey across the Arivaca corridor takes at least four days. This makes it impossible for migrants to carry enough water with them for the journey.

Speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site*, Enrique Morones, a founder of the San Diego-based organization Border Angels, which has conducted water drops since 1996, explained that for many immigrant workers, the extra supplies are the difference between life and death.

“It can literally save someone’s life,” he said. “Very rarely do we see people drinking the water. But we have before, and we know it gets drunk because we find the bottles. I got a call from one guy, named Francisco, in 2001. He said, ‘I want to let you know that two weeks ago, you saved my father’s life.’ He had gone to Los Angeles for his mother’s funeral. It

was on his way back that he needed the water to live.”

“We also visit day laborers or people looking for work and make sure they’ve got food and water. Several times I’ve had people say, ‘Oh yeah, thanks for that water in the desert. Thanks to you, we made it.’ Not too long ago, someone told me they had crossed and thought they found water, but when they got to it, it had been slashed. They almost died.”

The report also documents the systematic harassment and intimidation of pro-immigrant groups by border patrol in the region. It cites a June 2017 raid on a No More Deaths medical aid camp. The patrol had placed sensors and cameras around the camp, turning it into a trap for migrants in need of medical attention.

The report is the second installment of a three-part series on “Death and Disappearance on the US-Mexico Border.” The first part, published in December 2017, was titled “The consequences of chase and scatter in the wilderness.” In addition to documenting the physical assault of immigrants by border patrol agents, it cites multiple examples of individuals who become lost and separated from their groups after fleeing from agents.

The following is one example: “Ulises was crossing through South Texas in August of 2015. According to a call received by his family, he had been left behind by his group after having been pursued by Border Patrol agents for three hours. He has a mental disability: according to his family he ‘has the mind of a nine- or ten-year-old child.’ Apparently he was left near a cattle tank with some water. To this date, no information has been found about Ulises; his whereabouts remain unknown.”

The latest revelations shed light on the fascistic types who police the borders of the United States. But their actions flow logically from the reactionary anti-immigrant policies of both the Republican and Democratic parties.

As far as the political establishment is concerned, the deaths of hundreds of people each year serve the purpose of deterring anyone from considering seeking refuge. The overwhelming majority of those who cross the US-Mexico border are fleeing the consequences of US-backed coups and dictatorships or military interventions. The political establishment in the United States, as around the world, is united in its efforts to whip up nationalism and anti-immigrant chauvinism to

divide the working class.

The Democratic administration of Bill Clinton implemented “Operation Gatekeeper” in 1993 and “Hold the Line” in 1994, building up border patrol manpower in major urban crossing points, and forcing immigrants to cross uninhabitable and dangerous regions. This policy was escalated by the Bush administration under the fraudulent banner of the “war on terror,” with the full support of the corporate media.

President Barack Obama deported more immigrants than all previous administrations combined, earning the title “deporter in chief.” In 2010 he announced an additional \$600 million to further militarize the US-Mexico border, including the deployment of Predator drones and the hiring of an additional 1,000 border patrol agents. It is no coincidence that the years covered by the latest report—2012 to 2015—fall under the terms of the “deporter in chief.”

Today there are 21,000 border patrol agents in the US, more than twice the number there were in 2005. Last month the Trump administration ordered the hiring of 5,000 more, who are being emboldened by his administration’s efforts to whip up an extreme-right and fascistic base of support. The latest report was released the same day as reports broke of an impending mass police-state dragnet against immigrants in California, with the aim of rounding up at least 1,500 undocumented workers.

These are the forces responsible for death on the US-Mexico border.



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