

Trump administration announces National Guard deployment to US-Mexico border

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On Wednesday evening, the White House announced that President Trump had signed a proclamation dispatching the National Guard to the southern US border to crack down on immigration. Earlier in the day Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen reported that both the Department of Defense and the DHS had been asked to coordinate with the governors of the southwestern border states to facilitate the mobilization of troops.

This announcement comes after a series of racist and xenophobic tweetstorms by Trump since Sunday. Almost immediately after Fox News featured a story about the migrant “caravan” that was moving through Mexico towards the US border over the weekend, Trump went on a Twitter rampage against “weak border laws.” At a meeting with the leaders of the Baltic states Tuesday, Trump promised to use the military to “guard the border” claiming “we cannot have people flowing into our country illegally, disappearing, and by the way never showing up for [immigration] court.”

The “caravan” that precipitated the latest onslaught is a pretext used by the administration to carry out an escalation of its anti-immigrant policies. The caravan is a symbolic annual event organized by the group People Without Borders. Those refugees who ultimately make it to the US border normally turn themselves over to Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and ask for asylum.

At the press briefing announcing the new initiative yesterday, DHS Secretary Nielsen demurred as to whether this was a measure aimed against the migrant caravan. “I think what’s true is the President is frustrated. He’s been very clear he wants to secure the border,” Nielsen said. “I think what you’re seeing is the President taking his job very seriously.”

Reporters pointed to the DHS’s own study from Fall 2017 asserting that the border was at its most difficult for immigrants to cross than at any point in US history. Nielsen brushed this aside, claiming that there was “an uptick” in border crossings during the spring and that this was an anticipatory measure: “Why not yesterday and tomorrow? Today is the day we want to start this process...The threat is real...”

As of now, there are no details regarding how many troops are going to be deployed, where they will be deployed, how long they would be deployed, or what their precise role will be. However, Nielsen stated that troops could be dispatched as early as Wednesday night. As for their role, she stated vaguely, “It’s our expectation that the National Guard will deploy personnel in support of CBP’s border security mission.”

Donald Trump is not the first US president to deploy the National Guard for immigration enforcement purposes. Both his predecessors did the same. From 2006-2008, George W. Bush deployed 6,000 guardsmen to southern border states, costing \$1.2 billion. From 2010-2012 Barack Obama sent 1,200 guardsmen to the border at a cost of more than \$110 million.

In past deployments, the National Guard has helped CBP and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in support roles like training, construction and intelligence gathering. Secretary Nielsen did give lip service to the legal proscription on using the military for police powers. She said the National Guard would be used in the same manner as before, and was not being authorized to arrest undocumented immigrants “as of now.”

However, given the escalation of the attacks against immigrants as well as on the democratic rights of the

population as a whole, the measure is yet another ominous step in the militarization of the border and raises the looming threat of martial law.

Unlike the Obama administration's use of troops at the border, Trump appears to be preparing the National Guard for a more active role. On Sunday, "Fox & Friends" described the caravan as a "small army of migrants marching toward the United States."

By sending its own military forces to putatively stop this "army of migrants," the administration was setting up a potentially bloody clash with civilians who are predominantly asylum seekers. In an effort to cool tensions, the Mexican government has announced that the migrant caravan will disperse in the coming days.

The Democratic Party is neither interested in nor capable of mounting any serious opposition to Trump's fascistic anti-immigrant policies. In recent weeks, the Democrats overwhelmingly supported the \$1.3 trillion dollar budget deal which including \$641 million in added funding for ICE and an additional \$1.6 billion for the militarization of the US/Mexico border.

The timing of these measures coincides with a growing strike movement among educators, including along the US-Mexico border in the state of Arizona.

Responding to Trump's proposal to deploy troops to his state, Arizona Governor Doug Ducey tweeted: "Arizona welcomes the deployment of National Guard to the border. Washington has ignored this issue for too long and help is needed. For Arizona, it's all about public safety."

Ducey welcomes the sending of the National Guard because it sends a message to the state's protesting teachers that the state is prepared to prosecute the interests of the capitalist class with force and violence. Ducey recently rejected teachers' demands for a wage increase. Arizona cities like Yuma (population 95,000) and Tucson (530,000) are close to the border and could be used as staging centers for the National Guard. Teachers driving to protests in the capital Phoenix may be waved down and subject to searches by guardsmen at checkpoints.

All of this would be aimed at intimidating workers from advancing their demands for wages and a fully funded public education system. Thirty-five years ago, in 1983, Arizona's Democratic Governor Bruce Babbitt deployed hundreds of National Guard soldiers to crush a strike of copper workers at Phelps Dodge in

the towns of Morenci, Ajo, Clifton, and Douglas.

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