

Trump orders indefinite detention of immigrants at border as troop deployment looms

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In a memo published late on Friday night, the Trump administration announced it will take concrete measures to indefinitely jail immigrants captured crossing the border. Not since President Franklin Roosevelt ordered the internment of Japanese and Japanese-Americans has the government put in motion mass incarceration on such a scale.

The new policy is part of an overall campaign of terror by the Trump administration, with the complicity of the Democrats, targeting immigrant workers. On Thursday, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials raided a meatpacking plant in rural Tennessee, arresting 97 immigrants, in one of the largest workplace raids in recent years.

The Trump administration memo will exponentially expand the constellation of immigrant internment camps that dot the American southwest. It calls for the attorney general and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to “allocate all legally available resources to construct, operate, control, or modify—or establish contracts to construct, operate, control, or modify—facilities to detain aliens for violations of immigration law at or near the borders of the United States.”

As of Friday evening, no Democratic Party leader had indicated opposition to the memo. In March, Democrats joined Republicans in passing a \$1.3 trillion spending bill that included a provision that grants Trump the power to expand the system of immigrant prisons “as necessary to ensure the detention of aliens prioritized for removal.”

Friday's memo orders DHS to produce “a detailed list of all existing facilities, including military facilities, that could be used, modified, or repurposed to detain

aliens for violations of immigration law at or near the borders of the United States.” The real purpose of Trump's decision to deploy 2,000-4,000 National Guard troops to the US-Mexico border is to mobilize soldiers to guard makeshift military detention camps or free up ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents to perform that function.

The memo cites as its authority executive orders issued by Trump in January 2017 that call for an end to what Trump refers to as the policy of “catch and release.” This is, in fact, a basic principle of due process. Immigrants who are interviewed by an asylum officer and can prove they have a “credible fear” of returning to their home country are allowed to live in the US as their deportation proceedings play out in administrative court.

Both the memo's demand for an appraisal of national detention facilities and its timing—coming after nearly a week of racist, anti-immigrant statements by Trump and the announcement of the deployment of the National Guard—indicates that Trump is taking active steps to put his internment plan in motion.

The move is strengthened by a March Supreme Court decision that immigrants do not have the right to bail hearings. As a result, the implementation of Trump's plan will leave tens or hundreds of thousands of immigrants incarcerated for months or even years. The average immigration case is pending for nearly two years.

The memo is based on a fraudulent and racist pretext. It cites the “smuggling of drugs and other contraband, and entry of gang members and other criminals at the border of the United States” who “threaten our national security and public safety.”

The overwhelming majority of immigrants crossing the US-Mexico border are workers who have never committed any crime and are seeking refuge from home countries ravaged by decades of imperialist exploitation and US-backed dictators and death squads.

Friday night's memo calls for DHS and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to "assign asylum officers to immigration detention facilities" to quickly determine whether immigrants have a credible fear of returning to their home countries. The memo demands that these officers ensure that immigrants do not "illegally exploit" asylum laws "to prevent the removal of otherwise removable aliens."

In other words, the administration is giving asylum officers tacit orders to deny the vast majority of worthy asylum applications and ensure the broadest possible deportation. During credible fear interviews, officers routinely commit fraud, make up testimony, destroy immigrants' documents and belongings, and force them to sign paperwork they have not read.

The memo also calls on the secretary of state and DHS to take measures "against countries that refuse to expeditiously accept the repatriation of their nationals." Some countries, like Somalia, Cambodia and others, do not accept the repatriation of people who do not have documents proving they were born in those countries.

The *New York Times* and the Democratic Party have downplayed the significance of the directive. The *Times* wrote Friday night, calling the memo "a symbolic move" that "does not, on its own, toughen immigration policy or take concrete steps to do so."

In fact, the memo orders the Pentagon to put together a list of internment camps and toughen its policies to detain immigrants. The *Times* and the Democratic Party fear that Trump's moves—published late night Friday in order to receive limited attention—will generate mass protests akin to those that swept the country after Trump issued his initial travel ban in January 2017.



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