

US plans to detain minors on military bases as Trump calls immigrants “animals”

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US authorities are surveying American military bases for sites for concentration camps to house thousands of children that the government intends to seize from their parents at the US border under a draconian new policy announced by the Trump administration.

The plans for the mass detention of child refugees—in some cases infants ripped from the arms of their mothers—at sites secured by armed troops have emerged amid a steady escalation of anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric that has assumed an increasingly fascist character.

The conceptions driving immigration policy were spelled out by Donald Trump during a right-wing propaganda event staged at the White House Wednesday in which the US president met with roughly a dozen Republican mayors, sheriffs and other officials from California who are opposed to the state’s so-called “sanctuary law.”

The Trump administration and the Republican right have cast the legislation passed last year as an unconstitutional challenge to federal control over immigration policy. In reality, far from protecting immigrants, California merely demands that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a thuggish national police agency accustomed to carrying out warrantless searches and riding roughshod over constitutional rights, follows due process in order to obtain cooperation of local and state police.

Fulminating over a non-existent crime wave supposedly caused by the law preventing the round-up of “criminal aliens,” Trump declared: “We have people coming into the country, or trying to come in, and we’re stopping a lot of them, but we’re taking people out of the country. You wouldn’t believe how bad these people are. These aren’t people. These are animals.”

The comment drew widespread protests from immigrant rights advocates within the United States as well as from the government of Mexico, whose Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray said that the remark was “absolutely unacceptable” and that the Mexican government would file a formal complaint with the US State Department.

Videgaray was no doubt particularly disturbed by Trump’s statements accusing Mexico of having done “nothing for us, especially at the border.” In reality, Mexico—with US assistance—has carried out a repressive crackdown on its own southern border, detaining and deporting tens of thousands of Central Americans seeking to escape the intolerable conditions of violence and poverty in their countries.

Trump’s branding of immigrants as “animals” follows a statement made the week before by John Kelly, the White House chief of staff and former secretary of Homeland Security, who commented in an interview that the vast majority of undocumented immigrants entering the US are “not people that would easily assimilate into the United States, into our modern society.”

This literal dehumanization and continuous demonization of refugees and other undocumented immigrants is directed not only at whipping up support among Trump’s extreme right base, but at justifying a policy that essentially criminalizes immigration.

The US Homeland Security and Justice Departments have unveiled a ferocious new anti-immigrant policy that calls for the criminal prosecution of every immigrant detained crossing the border without documents and separating children from them as they are sent to jail awaiting trial. Attorney General Jeff Sessions recently referred to immigrant families entering the US as “smuggling” their own children.

“That child will be separated from you as required by law,” he declared. “If you don’t like that, then don’t smuggle children over our border.”

This savage policy will inevitably result in tens of thousands more children being separated from their parents by the US government. To prepare for this criminal outcome of a fascistic immigration policy, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has begun making site visits to four US military installations—Fort Bliss, Goodfellow Air Force Base and Dyess Air Force Base in Texas, and Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas—to assess their suitability for housing child detention centers.

The turn to the military to handle the imprisonment of migrant children was first reported by the *Washington Post*, based on emails from HHS to the Pentagon.

HHS is already running a network of 100 shelters spread across 14 states with a capacity to incarcerate 10,571 immigrant children. According to the agency, that system is already filled up to 91 percent capacity.

The arrests of parents and the seizing of their children are policies developed by the Trump administration to serve as a “deterrent” against refugees and immigrants seeking to enter the US.

Defending this brutal initiative in an interview with National Public Radio, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen stated: “That’s no different than what we do every day in every part of the United States when an adult of a family commits a crime. If you as a parent break into a house, you will be incarcerated by police and thereby separated from your family. We’re doing the same thing at the border.”

This logic is breathtaking. Every immigrant is, by definition, a criminal, no different than a burglar. Summarily dismissed are the rights of refugees, guaranteed under international law. Many of the families arriving at the US border are fleeing Central America, where real crimes were committed by US imperialism in the form of support for military dictatorships, genocidal civil wars and terrorist armies, shattering entire societies.

The use of American military bases to imprison immigrant children is not without precedent. In 2014 under the Obama administration, bases in Oklahoma, Texas and California were used to hold 7,000 children for months. Others were incarcerated under inhuman conditions in converted warehouses and other

makeshift prisons without adequate sanitation, medical care or bed space.

These appalling conditions resulted in legal challenges and Federal court rulings mandating that the government avoid detaining minors whenever possible and rejecting the deterrence of immigration as a valid justification for detaining immigrant families and children seeking asylum. The Trump administration is now attempting to evade these rulings.

The logic of US immigration policies was spelled out in a typically vicious fashion by the far-right media provocateur Ann Coulter, who tweeted earlier this week in response to a *New York Times* article reporting on Israeli snipers shooting down unarmed Palestinian demonstrators on the Gaza border, “Can we do that?”

This was no mere jest. The US-Mexican border is already one of the most heavily militarized frontiers on the planet. The Trump administration, like the Obama administration before it, has mobilized thousands of National Guard troops to augment the forces of the Border Patrol, which recently asked for additional military reinforcements backed by helicopters and other military equipment.

Having given its unqualified support to the Israeli massacre of the Palestinian protesters in Gaza, it is hardly a stretch of the imagination to foresee the US government employing similar deadly force against undocumented immigrants and refugees on the US-Mexican border and, indeed, against opposition from the American working class itself.



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