

The brutality of borders

Mass grave revealed at Arizona Air Force bombing range

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A border search-and-rescue group, *Aguilas del Desierto*, or “Eagles of the Desert,” found over a dozen remains of migrants after it was given special permission to search for a missing person within a limited southern section of the Barry Goldwater Air Force bombing range in Welling, Arizona, along the US/Mexico border.

The bombing range is a vast 70-mile vast swath of land that stretches from Southeast of Yuma, Arizona all the way to the Sonoran Desert National Monument. The range crosses through well-known migrant routes and has remained inaccessible to human aid groups or forensics teams.

Eagles of the Desert (EED) was the first group ever allowed to perform searches on the high security bombing range which is utilized for air-to-ground bombing practice by A-10s, F-16s and F-35 Lightning II Air Force Jets. The base is also used for Marine Corps and NATO allied flight crews while deployed to any of the aforementioned bases for training.

EED was allowed limited access to an unused area to search for the individual for whom they had a missing person’s report. The migrant was never found, but in the short time frame of searching, the group came across 13 human remains in a very small section of the bombing range.

The concentration of remains in the limited area leaves little doubt to EED that the number of remains is likely in the hundreds, if not thousands. Last year a Texas sheriff commented, “For every one [body] we find, we’re probably missing five.”

The treacherous deserts along the Southwest have taken the lives of untold tens of thousands of migrants coming to the United States.

Investigative reporter John Carlos Frey helped break the story, which points unmistakably to negligence by the authorities, as well as the utter disregard by officials for the lives of migrants.

Frey told *Democracy Now*, “For the most part, sheriffs, police departments, police agencies in the United States do not count migrants who are missing as missing persons. So these individual names are not being turned over to the database. So there’s no way for someone in Latin America to search for their loved ones through a DNA sample, because those names have not been entered in the database....The federal government has washed its hands of these individuals and is not assisting, either financially or by allowing names to be put into the database.”

Frey also commented on the direct correlation between the denial of asylum at the border and the high volume of those perishing while crossing. Hundreds of asylum seekers have continued to camp out for days and weeks, only to be turned away by the Border Patrol citing the June announcement by US Attorney General Jeff Sessions that Washington will no longer consider victims of domestic or gang violence for asylum status.

“Individuals who are trying to make a claim of asylum have fled their countries because they don’t have a choice. They’re fleeing for their lives. If we are not allowing them in to make a claim of asylum, they will go another way. And the route that’s available to them are the deserts of the American Southwest. It is most likely now that individuals who cross that desert will be put in peril. They will suffer just going through, especially this time of year. We can count on the fact that many of these individuals may perish,” Frey told *Democracy Now*.

Refusing to accept asylum applications is a flagrant violation of international human rights law. The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees “provides that no one shall expel or return a refugee against his or her will, in any manner whatsoever, to a territory where he or she fears threats to life or freedom.”

The reality is that Washington’s policies of denying asylum have forced many migrants to partake in the brutal 7-10 day journey across scorching desert in temperatures that soar over 110 degrees Fahrenheit. The endless lines at the border and outright denial of asylum explode all of the noxious rhetoric that immigrants should be crossing “legally.”

In 2015 another mass grave in Brooks County, Texas came to light, which contained the remains of more than 300 immigrants which federal agents gathered from the desert. At that time, a reporting team that included Frey found that many of the migrants had died after waiting hours for Border Patrol to respond to their 911 calls.

It can only be concluded that Washington relies on great numbers perishing in the treacherous conditions. Revelations early this year detailed the systematic destruction of lifesaving aid by Border Patrol agents and the increasing harassment and surveillance of humanitarian organizations such as No More Deaths (NMD) and Border Angels.

Organizations reported that between 2012 and 2015, on average occurring more than twice a week, 3,586 gallons of water were vandalized.

In addition, this year nine members of NMD faced federal prosecution for the supposed “crime” of leaving water and medical aid to migrants on the verge of death in the Arizona desert. Scott Warren, an instructor at Arizona State University, faces a felony charges for harboring two people and providing “food and water for approximately three days,” according to the US District Court of Arizona.

Warren could face up to five years in prison. These charges harken back to the harboring of Jews during the Holocaust or of Japanese in California during internment. Increasingly, Washington continues to pursue the working class as it mounts an offensive to protect refugees and immigrants across the globe.

The devastation immigrants flee is the result of decades of US involvement throughout Central and

Latin America, which has created violent conditions and maintain the high levels of poverty reflected in state and gang violence. The same process on the other side of the globe results in the death of thousands who have drowned in the Mediterranean fleeing Washington’s wars.

Only the fight for socialism, predicated on internationalism and opposition to imperialist war, can break apart the violent, militarized borders and the nation state, finally allowing humanity to move freely across the globe.



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