

Trump considers reinstating family separations at the border

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According to a report in the *Washington Post* Friday, the Trump administration is considering reinstating a version of the “zero tolerance” family separation program it implemented in May as part of its ongoing war against immigrants. In the most widely discussed proposal, parents who cross the border will be detained with their children for 20 days, at which point they will be forced to choose between being deported together or being detained separately.

This sadistic policy, likely devised by Trump’s aide Stephen Miller, has a distinctly fascistic character. The proposal to force parents to choose between separation and deportation to war-torn, violence-ridden Central America constitutes a form of emotional torture.

The government is employing the language of the extreme right, linking the mass detention of children with “tough-on-crime” rhetoric aimed at falsely presenting immigrants as a threat to public safety.

In an email statement to the *Post*, deputy White House Press Secretary Hogan Gidley said, “Career law enforcement professionals in the U.S. government are working to analyze and evaluate options that would protect the American people, prevent the horrific actions of child smuggling, and stop drug cartels from pouring into our communities.”

A Department of Homeland Security (DHS) official told *Politico*, “There is currently a crisis at our southern border as we encounter rising numbers of adults who enter the country illegally with children. Catch-and-release loopholes in the law incentivize illegal border-crossers to take this dangerous journey because they are unlikely to face consequences for their illegal conduct and in fact will almost certainly be released.”

US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is also reportedly considering eliminating the right of any asylum applicant to appear before a judge.

“Everything’s on the table,” the DHS official told *Politico*. “Nothing is ruled out by virtue of having litigation risk.”

In other words, the Constitution and international law are dead letters. These words are a serious threat not only to democratic rights, but also to the physical safety of immigrants.

Thirteen thousand immigrant children are already detained at present, including 200 children who were separated from their parents when the “zero tolerance” program was implemented this spring. In total, over 2,500 children were forcibly taken away from their parents and kept in detention centers around the country. A recent report by the Associated Press shows the government has put some separated children up for adoption in recent years without notifying parents.

Despite this brutality on the part of the government, the *Washington Post* report was met with near total silence in the bourgeois press, and the issue received scant attention on the Sunday talk shows.

The media silence is part of a pattern that has emerged over the first 18 months of the Trump administration.

First, Trump and his fascist aides implement a ruthless and unprecedented attack on immigrants—i.e., Trump’s initial travel ban, his family separation policy, widespread workplace raids, the abrogation of temporary protected status and the barring of social service recipients from gaining legal status.

Second, the population reacts with shock and horror, voicing widespread opposition to the government for its attack on immigrants, often in the form of mass spontaneous demonstrations.

Third, the Democratic Party either ignores the issue outright or appears at protests to tell demonstrators that their only option is to vote for Democrats in the

midterm elections. Fourth, when media attention has died down, the courts rubber stamp Trump's proposals anyway. Through this sordid process, the political establishment creates conditions for new and more intense attacks on immigrants.

The Trump administration's policy towards undocumented immigrants is a continuation of a framework that has guided US administrations at least since the mid-1990s. As a recent report by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) makes clear, the Clinton administration started the multiyear build-up of border enforcement resources and infrastructure under its "deterrence through prevention" strategy.

Under the Bush and Obama administrations, Border Patrol implemented what it called "consequences" intended to raise the practical, psychological and financial costs of crossing the border without documents.

These included returning Mexican crossers to locations far from where they were apprehended, increasing the use of formal deportations (and long-term detentions) rather than simply turning people around at the border, and prosecuting individuals criminally for immigration offenses. Obama, who earned the title of "deporter-in-chief" for deporting over 3 million border crossers during his tenure, also oversaw the establishment of the family detention centers that are now being expanded under Trump.

As the MPI report makes clear, the current wave of migrants who make the arduous crossings at the Southwestern borders of the United States are not child smugglers or drug dealers, they are working class men and women who, along with young children, have been forced to flee desperate situations created by violence and the devastation caused by American imperialism.

Last month, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced its intention to triple the size of a temporary "tent city" detention center in Tornillo, Texas to house up to 3,800 children. Approximately \$266 million in funding to increase shelter capacity will be redirected from a number of other, actually socially useful HHS programs, including Head Start, HIV prevention programs and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In addition, sponsors who could assume guardianship of detained children have not come forward because the Trump administration has specifically arrested

immigrants who claim their detained underage relatives or family friends.



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