

Trump to deploy hundreds of troops to the border against Central American migrants

Andrea Lobo
26 October 2018

The US Defense Department is expected to approve as early as next week the deployment of 800 to 1,000 active duty troops, mostly from the Army and Air Force, to the US-Mexico border, according to Trump administration officials.

While media reports indicated that details have not been finalized, this is the most concrete indication so far that the Pentagon plans to deploy troops domestically against the “caravan” of thousands of Central American migrants, mostly families with women and children that are currently crossing Mexico and seeking to reach the US.

The comments made by the US officials and media commenters sought to minimize the significance of the deployment, stating that the troops will be composed of engineers, aviation support, doctors and lawyers. Troops can still carry arms, CNN cites a military official, but “solely for self-defense.”

However, the unofficial announcement comes exactly one week after Trump first threatened to “call up the U.S. Military and CLOSE OUR SOUTHERN BORDER!” He called the caravan an “onslaught” and said that the impoverished workers and peasants are “hardened criminals,” while making unfounded and racist claims that “Middle-Easterners” have joined it.

On Thursday morning, Trump restated his threat to deploy the military on Twitter, calling it a “National Emergency” and adding, “They will be stopped!” The previous night at a rally in Wisconsin he said the military was “all set” to be sent against the migrants.

Such a move would violate the Posse Comitatus Act, which prohibits the armed forces from carrying out domestic law-enforcement activities, excluding the National Guard. While US officials speaking to CNN denied that troops would deal directly with the caravan, a myriad of provocations can be construed to justify their direct intervention, which could turn into a massacre of unarmed workers and children on the basis of “self-defense.”

Last weekend, at the Guatemala-Mexico border, about 400 Mexican anti-riot police began an assault against the migrants by tackling and shooting tear-gas canisters against the

defenseless families seeking to cross the bridge toward the port of entry. Some migrants responded by throwing rocks, sandals and other objects, which led to an even more aggressive attack by the police.

While not confirming the deployment, Captain Bill Speaks, spokesman for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, wrote in an email to *Military Times* that the Department of Defense will “ensure the safety and security of the CBP [Customs and Border Patrol] personnel involved in border security operations.”

The troops are expected to join the 2,100 National Guardsmen already deployed across the US-Mexico border in late May.

The move is bound up with Trump’s efforts to exploit the caravan to ramp up nationalist and xenophobic sentiments ahead of the November 6 midterm elections in the United States.

The caravan has become a massive demonstration of workers. As they marched into Mexico, the 7,000-strong caravan chanted “Migrants are not criminals! We are international workers!” Mexican workers and peasants have warmly welcomed them with food, supplies and lifts.

The domestic deployment of the military against immigrants is a serious warning to the entire working class in the United States and internationally, immigrant or native-born alike. The ruling class is ready to respond to any defiance to the foundations of capitalist rule by proclaiming a “national emergency” and employing deadly repression.

As the Pentagon escalates its military confrontations against its main geopolitical rivals, the US ruling class is preparing to suppress all political dissent. The domestic deployment of troops is a precedent for waging total war against rivals abroad and social opposition at home.

On Tuesday, US Vice President Mike Pence told the media that the Honduran president, Juan Orlando Hernández, had assured him that the caravan was being “organized by leftist organizations and financed by Venezuela,” which Trump has referred to repeatedly as “socialist.” Such arguments seek to characterize the migrants as a “foreign invasion” to

create a ready-made pretext for a violent attack against the migrants.

The Mexican and Guatemalan authorities have also deployed their militaries to stop the caravan. The Guatemalan government reported that it has sent back about 4,000 Honduran migrants. It placed military personnel and barbed wire at the main highway into the country from Honduras, at Agua Caliente. However, about 2,500 Hondurans who crossed into Guatemala on Tuesday successfully repelled the Guatemalan police and military officials who were requesting documentation and seeking to make arrests. According to the Guatemalan *Prensa Libre*, they simply marched forward as a group.

The current Central American caravan across southern Mexico and Guatemala is estimated at 14,000 migrants, according to the Mexican *El Universal*, with additional contingents planned. The main body leading the caravan yesterday left the town of Mapastepec in the Mexican state of Chiapas, about 95 miles from the Guatemalan border.

The migrants are at least 1,000 miles from the US border. There can be long pauses to regroup as the caravan faces the efforts of Mexican authorities to divide, detain and deport the migrants. It is therefore uncertain when it will reach the US and how large it will be.

The fascistic policy of the Trump administration builds on measures previously supported and implemented by the Democratic administration of Barack Obama, which presided over more deportations than any other. While Trump has taken these policies to a new level, the parallels of both administrations include family separations, the deployment of the National Guard to the border, the expansion of surveillance and physical barriers at the border, the deportation of minors, and the buildup and use of the Mexican armed forces as an extension of the US border patrol.

Policies such as the separation and prolonged detention of migrant families violate US and international law, constituting torture and crimes against humanity. Moreover, the attempted deportation of a Salvadoran mother and daughter in August in the middle of an ongoing hearing demonstrates the sheer lawlessness with which the government is carrying out its policies.

Trump's threat to force migrants to apply for asylum in Mexico before reaching the US is another breach of US and international law.

The response of the Democratic Party to Trump's onslaught against immigrants was characterized by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who told Democratic candidates this month that insisting on criticizing Trump's anti-immigrant policies was a "waste of energy." Even after Trump's threats against the caravan, Democratic leaders

kept accusing Trump for "changing the topic."

The Democrats have instead focused their electoral appeals on stoking militarism and anti-Russia hysteria to portray Trump as "too soft" on Russia. In addition to seeking to compel Trump to adopt a more aggressive stance against Russia, this campaign has been used to attack basic democratic rights, including through internet censorship.

Democratic legislators have led an offensive for pressuring the Ecuadorian government to hand over WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange, calling him a "threat to global security," while seeking to incriminate him as an actor in the supposed Russian interference in the 2016 elections.

Without WikiLeaks, Americans and the world would not know the extent of the lies and US cover-up of the Honduran military coup of June 28, 2009 that installed a regime even more pliant to US demands and further worsened the social crisis behind the mass migration.

After the coup in 2009, the State Department insisted to the press that it did not know "who did what to whom." However, a cable released by WikiLeaks dated July 24, 2009 from the US embassy in Honduras and sent to the Obama's White House and Hillary Clinton's State Department explores legalistic rationalizations "for a solution" to justify the overthrow. It concludes that the event "constituted an illegal and unconstitutional coup" and that the "Forced Removal [of President Manuel Zelaya] by Military was Clearly Illegal."

The months and years that followed saw a dramatic intensification of the use of death squads and the military to repress social opposition against the coup and the resultant wave of corporate tax cuts, tax exemptions, cuts to environmental and labor regulations, and corrupt concessions that chiefly favored US and local corporations. A 2014 report by the US think tank Center for Economic and Policy Research measuring the impact of the overthrow found that poverty had increased 13.2 percent and extreme poverty 26.3 percent in the first two years after the military coup.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact