

The threat to close the US-Mexico border

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The threat by the Trump administration to close the 2,000-mile-long US-Mexican border, the busiest international boundary on the face of the planet, with roughly 350 million documented crossings each year, is an unmistakable symptom of the intense crisis of a global capitalist system that is careening toward dictatorship and war.

The pretext for this international provocation is a supposed “national emergency” created by Central American refugees fleeing horrific levels of violence and poverty. These conditions in the so-called Northern Triangle of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are the legacy of a century of US imperialist oppression, marked by near-genocidal counterinsurgency wars and savage military dictatorships installed with Washington’s backing.

Trump lashed out at the right-wing and corrupt US-backed governments in Central America, tweeting that they “have taken our money for years, and do Nothing.” He followed the tweet with an order to cut off all US aid to the three Northern Triangle countries.

He also accused Mexico of “doing nothing to stop the flow of illegal immigrants to our Country,” and issued the threat to shut down the US-Mexico border.

He wants these governments to implement a policy of bloody repression sufficient to terrorize would-be asylum seekers, i.e., to make it clear that they are more certain to die if they attempt to leave their home countries than if they stay.

Trump, who has deployed some 4,700 US troops to the border and boasted of turning it into a war zone, confided last week to Fox News’ Sean Hannity that ordering troops to turn machine guns on the men, women and children seeking asylum would be “a very effective way of doing it,” but “We can’t do it.” One only need add the unspoken thought, “At least not yet.”

The shutting down of the border is meant as punishment against Mexico for failing to prevent the Central American refugees from heading north. In reality, the government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador

(AMLO), which came into office posturing as a “left” alternative, has collaborated closely with Washington, militarizing sections of its own side of the border and penning up migrants in concentration camps.

It has also acquiesced to the US Department of Homeland Security’s so-called Migrant Protection Protocols, or “Remain in Mexico” policy, which was imposed unilaterally, forcing asylum seekers to stay across the border in Mexico until their cases are heard, a process that can take months or even years. First implemented at the San Ysidro-Tijuana port of entry, it is now being extended to other border crossings, forcing refugee families to live in impoverished and dangerous conditions in Mexican border towns.

This cruel policy has been implemented as US migrant detention facilities are overflowing, with over 13,000 children being held in appalling conditions.

There are signs that the shutdown is being progressively implemented, with Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen ordering 750 agents transferred from ports of entry to Border Patrol units rounding up refugee families attempting to enter the US in more remote areas. This number may be expanded to 2,000, forcing the shutdown of entry lanes and a dramatic slowdown for those trying to cross the border.

The supposed “crisis” is of the immigration authorities’ own making, with the introduction of a go-slow policy for asylum seekers at the ports of entry, known as “metering,” which has forced them to seek to cross the border and turn themselves in elsewhere.

While the corporate media has treated the threat to close the border with its typical fatuousness—the most frequently broadcast report is on the danger of an avocado shortage—the human and economic costs of a shutdown are incalculable.

In a country where 36 million people are of Mexican descent and roughly one million people and nearly half a million vehicles cross the border every day, the separation of families, of workers from their jobs and students from their schools would inflict immense hardship. As for the

economy, the US Chamber of Commerce warned that a closure of the border would provoke “an unmitigated economic debacle,” affecting some \$1.7 billion in daily trade between the two countries.

Trump on Tuesday issued an ultimatum to congressional Democrats, saying that only their approval of sweeping changes in immigration laws could stop him from ordering the border shutdown. “We need to get rid of chain migration, we need to get rid of catch and release, and visa lottery, and we have to do something about asylum, and, to be honest with you, we have to get rid of judges,” he said. In other words, Trump is demanding a regime of summary deportation for anyone daring to set foot on US soil, riding roughshod over international laws protecting refugees and the right of asylum, as well as constitutional principles of due process.

Asked by reporters if he was concerned about the economic impact of closing the border, Trump responded, “Security is more important to me than trade. So we’re going to have a strong border, or we’re going to have a closed border.”

The irrationality of this approach is breathtaking. The global integration of the world capitalist economy is nowhere more evident than on the US-Mexican border. The breaking of supply chains linking the low-wage *maquiladora* factories that produce parts on the Mexican side of the border from the auto plants on the US side would result in short order in a paralysis of production, forcing plant shutdowns and, with time, threatening US automakers with bankruptcy.

This irrationality, however, lies not merely in the twisted and criminal mind of Donald Trump, but in the capitalist system itself and in the irreconcilable contradiction between the global integration of production and the capitalist nation-state system.

Trump is not some mad exception. Europe has effectively sealed its own borders to desperate migrants seeking refuge from the effects of 17 years of uninterrupted US-led wars in the Middle East and Central Asia. The Mediterranean has been turned into a no-go zone, where 34,000 have lost their lives. European Union member states have built over 600 miles of border walls since 1989 and deployed an additional 10,000 armed guards to keep out or deport anyone who makes it to the continent.

The sealing of borders, the laying of razor wire barricades, the creation of concentration camps for refugees and the whipping up of far-right, xenophobic and

fascist forces are all part of an international turn to reaction that echoes the darkest days of the 1930s. The buildup of militarized borders and the forces of state repression is directed against not only migrants and refugees, but the working class as a whole. In the US, Europe, Mexico, Latin America, the Middle East, North Africa and Asia, workers have entered into explosive struggles that have emerged for the most part outside of the control of the official pro-capitalist parties and trade unions.

This global movement found powerful expression in the strike by some 70,000 *maquiladora* workers in Matamoros, just a few miles from the US border, which began in January in opposition to the pro-company trade unions and the ruling Morena party of López Obrador. The strike underscored the objective character of the working class as an *international* class, connected in a single process of globally integrated production, with the stoppages in Mexico slowing production throughout the North American auto industry. As the Matamoros workers sought to forge new rank-and-file organizations to lead their struggles, they appealed for support from workers in the US and expressed solidarity with auto workers confronting plant shutdowns in North America.

This striving for the unification of the class struggle across the national boundaries that capitalist governments are seeking to transform into impenetrable war zones points the way forward for the workers of every country.

The crisis facing immigrant workers and the working class as a whole can be resolved only through the fight for the international unification of the working class based on the strategic perspective of world socialist revolution. This requires an unconditional defense of the right of workers from every part of the world to live and work in the country of their choice, and an irreconcilable struggle against every attempt to divide native-born and immigrant workers.



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