

US military set to loosen rules for troops operating along southern border

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The US military is preparing to approve a new request from the Department of Homeland Security that will loosen rules that bar troops from interacting with migrants crossing the border with Mexico.

According to a report Friday in the *Washington Post*, Senior Defense Department officials have recommended that acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan grant waivers for more than 300 troops from a long-standing policy prohibiting military personnel from coming into contact with migrants.

The requests from the Department of Homeland Security frame the measure as part of a humanitarian effort, claiming that it would allow the government to “provide military lawyers, cooks and drivers” to “assist” in handling a surge of migrants along the southern border.

In reality, it will facilitate the implementation of President Trump’s illegal and unconstitutional plans to use active duty soldiers to build and run new migrant detention camps.

The plans for such camps, outlined in an NBC report based on information from three unnamed Pentagon officials and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials, include using troops to conduct land assessments before the construction of new tent cities in El Paso and Donna, Texas and a new central processing center for migrants in El Paso.

The El Paso center is to be similar to one currently operating in McAllen, Texas, where children were held in cages last summer while the administration’s family separation policy was in effect.

These plans are being made amidst a vast escalation of the attack on immigrants and massive militarization of the US-Mexico border:

- Last week, videos and photos emerged of armed right-wing militias systematically detaining asylum-

seekers at gunpoint along the US-Mexico border in operations that the militias assert are coordinated with the federal Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agency.

- In a visit to the border in the middle of the month, Trump reportedly told the director of the CBP to bar asylum seekers from entering the US, a violation of international and US law, and promised that he would pardon him if he encountered any legal issues.

- On April 16, US Attorney General William Barr ordered immigration judges to deny bond to all asylum seekers who are not part of family groups that include children, essentially eviscerating the right to asylum.

- On April 3, in a raid on CVE Technology in Allen, Texas, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents arrested 280 employees.

Trump’s fascistic persecution of immigrants and open calls for illegal policies to create a system of internment centers poses an immense danger for the working class, immigrant and native born alike. The Trump administration’s increasingly dictatorial measures and reliance on the military are setting the stage for using the armed bodies of the state against all workers.

The vast majority of the population is horrified by Trump’s vicious persecution of immigrants, the militarization of the border and his moves toward authoritarian rule.

However, this opposition finds no expression in official establishment politics. The Democratic Party is virtually silent on Trump’s increasingly dictatorial maneuvers. When forced to discuss the issue, leading Democrats accept entirely the fundamental framework of Trump’s anti-immigrant campaign: that there exists a “crisis” at the border of undocumented immigrants entering the country.

The line of the Democratic Party is perhaps most

explicitly expressed in a *New York Times* column written by Thomas Friedman on April 23, “Trump Is Wasting Our Immigration Crisis.” Friedman bases his reactionary musings on a ride he took with the Border Patrol along the busiest port of entry on the border—San Ysidro, San Diego.

Friedman spends the bulk of the column outlining the immigration “crisis”, painting the Border Patrol agents in the most favorable light. “If these noncriminal illegal entrants have a young child in their group, the Border Patrol is obligated to get a car seat ... If they are sick, the border agents are obligated to take them to a local hospital.”

“Indeed, if you are pro-immigration” he writes, “as I am, you have to acknowledge that this haphazard ‘system’ has overwhelmed the Border Patrol and our immigration courts and contributed to Trump’s election.”

Friedman’s self-described “pro-immigration” policy in the final analysis arrives at all of the same fundamental conclusions as the Trump administration. This includes plans for a border wall and merit-based immigration “reform.”

Friedman explicitly calls for building a wall, writing, “The whole day left me more certain than ever that we have a real immigration crisis and that the solution is a *high wall with a big gate—but a smart gate.*”

Friedman’s disagreements with Trump on the question of immigration are not over the actual content of his proposals, but rather his approach: “What a terrible waste of a crisis” he laments at one point.

The line advanced by Friedman is echoed by nearly every single Democratic presidential candidate, with only minor differences in tactics. Bernie Sanders recently made a point at a campaign event in Iowa of declaring his opposition to open borders and warning that such a policy would open the floodgates to impoverished foreigners, echoing Trump’s efforts to pit US workers against their class brothers and sisters around the world.

The intense conflicts within the ruling establishment are not being fought out over any of the fundamental issues motivating tens of millions of workers, such as the fascist attacks on immigrants and the militarization of the border. On these questions, they agree. Rather, the conflicts between the two parties are over differences in foreign policy.



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