

Texas governor deploys troops, police against migrants in El Paso

Patrick Martin
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At the orders of Governor Greg Abbott, hundreds of Texas National Guard troops began patrolling the banks of the Rio Grande at El Paso, using concertina wire barricades and armored cars to physically block migrants seeking to cross from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico and file asylum claims.

The troops have been accompanied by state troopers from the Department of Public Safety, according to press reports.

“The service members are erecting concertina barrier as needed to funnel migrants to the designated points of entry,” the Texas National Guard stated, referring to the official crossings controlled by the federal Customs and Border Protection agency. “The primary goal of the Texas Army National Guard is to prevent illegal crossings into Texas,” the statement continued.

The troops will include “a Security Response Force comprised of ‘elements’ from the 606th Military Police Battalion, trained in civil disturbance operations and mass migration response,” the Guard statement declared. This suggests that the forces will be prepared to physically confront and attack migrants who offer any resistance.

In some cases, migrants have found themselves caught in the concrete riverbed with US troops guarding one side and Mexican Army troops patrolling the other side.

The Democratic congresswoman from El Paso, Representative Veronica Escobar, said on her Twitter feed that she had visited the area and seen “humvees and ... long guns.” She added, “I asked Border Patrol if they had requested this kind of support from the Texas National Guard, and they said they had not.”

The deployment comes as the number of migrants entering El Paso daily has dropped significantly since the weekend, likely because of plunging temperatures and full shelters for refugees, making it likely that asylum seekers and their children will have to sleep outdoors in sub-freezing weather.

The Department of Homeland Security said the number of border-crossers at El Paso had fallen from 2,500 on Saturday to about 1,500 on Monday. DHS said it had removed 10,000 migrants from the city in the past week, deporting 3,400 and transferring 6,600 to other locations within the United States.

The vast majority of the thousands of immigrants who are crossing the border and flooding into El Paso are legal asylum seekers from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba and Haiti, according to aid workers and reporters on the scene.

They are not crossing surreptitiously, but rather seeking out immigration officers as soon as they set foot on US soil, in order to present potentially valid claims to be granted refuge against political repression, gang violence and threats of torture and murder.

Contrary to the incessant lies and racist labeling by the corporate media and the US political establishment, these are not “illegal aliens.” Rather, it is the Texas governor who is acting illegally by deploying troops in what amounts to a usurpation of federal authority, as laid down in the US Constitution, which gives the federal government sole jurisdiction over the borders of the United States.

In their own way, Abbott’s actions are as flagrantly illegal and fascistic as those of the pro-Trump mob that stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 in an effort to block the certification of the victory of Democrat Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election. And they came only one day after the House Select Committee on the January 6 attack issued a criminal referral against Trump on four felony charges, including aiding and inciting an insurrection.

Unlike in the deployments ordered over the last two decades, the National Guard troops were sent to El Paso not to assist or support federal forces, but to carry out actions that even the Border Patrol thugs have been incapable of performing: physically walling off a section

of the border against desperate migrants fleeing for their lives.

While the troops had been instructed to tell migrants to proceed to the handful of official border crossings in the El Paso area to make their asylum applications, this was only for show. Both the US authorities and the migrants themselves know that they will not be allowed to file asylum claims at border crossings under the Title 42 restrictions on undocumented entry at these crossings, first imposed by the Trump administration in the name of preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Both the Trump and Biden administrations have maintained these restrictions even while steadily dismantling all protections against the coronavirus pandemic. The fate of Title 42 is now in the hands of the US Supreme Court, as 19 Republican-ruled states are suing against a Biden administration decision to replace it with other restrictions on asylum seekers, as yet unannounced.

As a spokesman for the American Civil Liberties Union noted, “The states seeking to keep Title 42 are acting hypocritically, to say the least, since they have opposed every COVID restriction except the one targeting vulnerable asylum seekers.”

Title 42 does not apply to the majority of the current wave of migrants, since their home countries do not have agreements with the US government to accept repatriated migrants. This underscores the political reality that the real purpose of the litigation against the lifting of Title 42 is to whip up an anti-immigrant frenzy in the fascistic base of the Republican Party.

These sentiments are further stoked up by officials like Abbott and the governors of Florida and Arizona, through provocative actions like shipping busloads of migrants—most of them legal asylum seekers—to northern cities such as Chicago, New York and Philadelphia, as well as to Washington D.C., and simply dumping them at bus stations.

The Biden administration has responded to the migration crisis by seeking \$3.5 billion in additional funding for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the omnibus spending bill now going through Congress, which will be used to hire more Border Patrol agents and give them pay raises, among other steps to strengthen border enforcement. The new-hires are to include 1,000 more Border Patrol processing coordinators to speed up handling of asylum requests. The administration would also redeploy 2,500 personnel and contractors from other agencies to bolster border

operations.

In the past fiscal year, the DHS has apprehended 2.3 million border-crossers, including nearly 700,000 children and teenagers, many of them traveling alone.

Abbott is seeking to exploit the crisis for political gain, both for the Republican Party as a whole and for his own rumored presidential aspirations. He sent a letter to the Biden White House in which he sought to pose as both the humanitarian defender of migrants facing “the bitter, dangerous cold as a polar vortex moves into Texas,” and as the avenging angel of Texas residents facing a foreign invasion, seeking “to protect Texas from the torrent of migrants and cartel activity streaming into our state.”

Over the past year, as part of his self-proclaimed “Operation Lone Star,” Abbott has deployed more than 6,000 National Guard troops along the border, with another 3,700 more operating away from the border but also assigned to an anti-immigrant mission.

Abbott made border enforcement the central issue in his successful reelection campaign against Democrat Beto O’Rourke. The Democrat also supported the use of National Guard troops and Texas state troopers on the border, while claiming to support “a balance” between enforcement and humanitarian aid. This would include massive outlays on sensors, drones and other devices to enforce the border remotely, without having to station soldiers at virtually every point along the 800-mile length of the Rio Grande.

This is essentially the approach of the Biden administration, which is concerned not so much with the potentially negative political impact of the immigration crisis, but that US military resources, including National Guard troops, should be focused on the ongoing proxy war with Russia and the military build-up against China in the Asia-Pacific region.



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