

Biden steps up attack on asylum seekers in advance of Title 42 expiration

Kevin Reed
28 April 2023

On Thursday, the Biden administration announced changes to immigration rules that significantly escalate the assault on the rights of migrants seeking to enter the US at the southern border.

The changes, which are being prepared before the May 11 expiration of Title 42 rules put in place in 2020 by the Trump administration and continued by Biden to carry out mass deportations, involve declaring nearly all migrants crossing the border “illegal” and deportable to Mexico or their home countries.

A centerpiece of the policy is the establishment of “regional processing centers” in Latin American countries, where immigration officials will attempt to block migrants from beginning their journey to the US by declaring them ineligible for asylum.

Additionally, the White House plan says that those who still attempt to cross the US border and seek asylum without applying in another country first will be immediately deported without access to a proper hearing.

In a joint press conference at the State Department, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Director of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas explained that the measures were being taken to stem an expected surge of migrants at the southern border when Title 42 is lifted in two weeks.

Title 42 rules had allowed the US government to expel hundreds of thousands of migrants on grounds that they posed a public health risk during the coronavirus pandemic. The xenophobic policy was put in place in March 2020 by then-president Trump while his administration simultaneously denied that COVID-19 posed any threat whatsoever within the US.

In his remarks on Thursday, Mayorkas made it clear that the new policy is an extension and intensification of Trump’s anti-immigrant program. He said:

“Beginning on May 12th, we will be—we will place eligible individuals who arrive at our southern border in expedited removal proceedings.”

Mayorkas went on to explain that the new rules will be more severe and migrants will be banned for five years and prosecuted for attempting to enter the US. “Unlike the Title 42 public health authority,” he said, “the penalty for being removed from the United States under Title 8 through expedited removal and other immigration laws we will be enforcing is not just removal. An individual who is removed is subject to at least a five-year ban on admission to the United States and can face criminal prosecution for any subsequent attempt to cross the border illegally.”

Mayorkas said that advanced technologies and expanded facilities will be used to carry out the deportations quickly and send the migrants back to their home countries. He hypocritically tried to claim that the Biden administration was sympathetic to the plight of migrants who go through the traumatic experience of making the journey to the US and are frequently taken advantage of by smugglers.

The processing center program will begin first in Colombia and Guatemala and be expanded to other countries with which the US has diplomatic relations. They will be staffed by international organizations that are partnering with the Biden administration. Mayorkas said those seeking entry into the US must schedule appointments at the centers.

Migrants from Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti and Nicaragua—countries where the US is either unable or unwilling to deport directly—will be sent back to Mexico under the terms of an agreement with the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

While Mayorkas said that US border officials have “no plans to detain families” at the border, it is known

that the Biden administration considered reviving the program that was used by the Trump White House.

For his part, Secretary of State Blinken focused on the global considerations behind the new policies. He said it was important to “step back” and look at the fact that, “there are more than 100 million people on the move today, compelled to leave their homes in search of security and better lives.”

Blinken spoke of the “long-term drivers” of the migrant crisis, explaining that “violence, corruption, lack of economic opportunity continue to push people from their homes—problems that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, crises of governance, extreme weather events caused by the changing climate.”

Of course, Blinken did not note that the factors he cited are the result of the policies of US imperialism and successive Democratic and Republican administrations over many decades. The plunder of “America’s back yard,” the herd-immunity COVID policy and the refusal and inability to address climate change are all directly tied to the drive for global domination by US corporate and financial interests.

Most corporate media outlets are straining to bolster the claims of the Biden administration that the new immigration rules are aimed at significantly raising admissions for refugee resettlement programs and other “pathways to US residency.” However, the White House did not provide any details about this and focused instead on the workings of the deportation program.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has pledged to file a lawsuit against the asylum ban on migrants who cross the southern border. Lee Gelernt, deputy director of the ACLU’s Immigrants’ Rights Project and lead attorney in Title 42-related lawsuits, told *Politico*, “We successfully sued to stop the Trump asylum bans and will sue again if the Biden administration enacts these anti-asylum rules.”

The International Refugee Assistance Project said in a statement that it “strongly opposes” the new measures “as a trade-off for limiting the legal rights of people seeking asylum in the United States.” The organization said the administration was pursuing an “asylum ban.”

Lacy Broemel, a project policy analyst, told the *Washington Post* that the organization is concerned with the lack of details in the Biden plan, and said, “We have more questions than answers.”

The timing of the immigration press conference, coming two days after Joe Biden announced his 2024 reelection campaign, is clearly an effort to respond to pressure from Republicans and extreme-right and fascist political forces in Congress.

As reported by the *Wall Street Journal*, “House Republicans, who have sharply criticized Mr. Biden’s handling of the border, are expected to unveil a sweeping immigration and border security bill on Thursday after months of internal disagreements over how to approach asylum seekers. Some Republicans have suggested the bill, which will likely be a nonstarter with Democrats and the White House, could be brought to the House floor on May 11 to coincide with the ending of Title 42.”



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