

Trump directs US military to take control of much of US-Mexico border

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13 April 2025

In a memorandum issued late Friday night, US President Donald Trump directed the US military to take control of a large portion of the US-Mexico border and adopt repressive measures that would effectively treat migrants crossing the border as though they were attacking a US military base.

The memorandum includes a section that reads: “In carrying out activities under this memorandum, members of the Armed Forces will follow rules for the use of force prescribed by the Secretary of Defense.” No boundaries are set to limit the use of force, meaning that Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, a notorious defender of US military war crimes and individual war criminals, could authorize the use of lethal force against immigrants seeking to enter the United States.

Under the title “Military Mission for Sealing the Southern Border of the United States and Repelling Invasions,” the memorandum directs the secretaries of Defense, Interior, Agriculture and Homeland Security to transfer all federal land within 60 feet of the land border with Mexico to the jurisdiction of the Pentagon.

This long strip of territory is known as the “Roosevelt Reservation” because it was originally set aside as federal land more than a century ago under President Theodore Roosevelt. It includes the vast bulk of the US-Mexico land border, passing through California, Arizona and New Mexico, but does not include the Rio Grande, the border between Texas and Mexico. The strip also excludes portions of Native American reservations along the border, and a few isolated pieces of private property.

In keeping with the general posture of the Democratic Party, which has collaborated with Trump’s fascist attacks on immigrants, there was no public response to the border memorandum from the Democratic governors of the three states involved, Gavin Newsom

of California, Katie Hobbs of Arizona and Michelle Lujan Grisham of New Mexico. Hobbs has been complaining for weeks that \$69 million in federal assistance for border enforcement was being held up by the DOGE review of grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, a unit of the DHS.

According to Trump’s order, the Roosevelt Reservation would be designated as “National Defense Areas” so that border enforcement activity would “occur on a military installation under the jurisdiction of the Department of Defense.” This would allow the administration to claim that military actions against migrants did not violate the Posse Comitatus Act, which prohibits the use of the military in police activities within the United States.

The memorandum enumerates broad powers for the secretary of defense to make use of the federal territory as he sees fit. It would explicitly enable “military activities ... including border-barrier construction and emplacement of detection and monitoring equipment.” This could also include detaining migrants, pending their transfer to the Department of Homeland Security for deportation.

According to an analysis by the *Wall Street Journal*:

The move would ultimately mean that the military’s massive budget can be more directly tapped for border security. The administration had been planning for weeks to transfer control of such lands to the military and potentially use the zone as a place to temporarily hold migrants who enter the U.S. illegally, according to defense officials. Many U.S. detention centers have been at their highest levels in years, creating a bottleneck for the White House goals

of mass deportations. The order, however, doesn't spell out that temporary detention facilities will be built on the lands.

While the initial military operation will be “phased” over 45 days, the memo declares: “At any time, the Secretary of Defense may extend activities under this memorandum to additional Federal lands along the southern border in coordination with the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Assistant to the President and Homeland Security Advisor, and other executive departments and agencies as appropriate.”

The “Assistant to the President and Homeland Security Advisor” is the formal title of Tom Homan, the former acting head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Trump's top anti-immigrant thug in the White House.

The entire memorandum incorporates Trump's claims that the movement of migrants across the US-Mexico border constitutes an “invasion” which, as the memo puts it, threatens “the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the United States.” The use of such language to describe the actions of desperate and starving refugees is both provocative and entirely unprecedented, aimed at leveraging Trump's powers as “commander-in-chief” to do anything he pleases.

This includes language that amounts to a blank check for the Pentagon and for local commanders along the border:

The Secretary of Defense may determine those military activities that are reasonably necessary and appropriate to accomplish the mission assigned in Executive Order 14167 and that are necessary to protect and maintain the security of military installations, consistent with section 2672 of title 10, United States Code, and the longstanding authority of a military installation commander to exclude persons from a military installation, as recognized in section 21 of the Internal Security Act of 1950.

In effect, every unit commander along the border would be designated a “military installation

commander” entitled to “exclude persons” from entering his installation—an immigration cop in all but name.

The memorandum makes frequent references to the executive orders Trump issued on January 20, the day of his inauguration, which made the war against immigrants the first priority of his administration. One of these orders instructs the secretaries of Defense and Homeland Security to report back within 90 days with “recommendations regarding additional actions that may be necessary to obtain complete operational control of the southern border, including whether to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807...”

Trump sought to invoke this law in June 2020 against the mass protests that erupted following the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. This would have the effect of establishing martial law, not only along the US-Mexico border, but across the entire territory of the United States. No president has declared martial law since the Civil War of 1861–1865.

Meanwhile, in an additional measure directed towards transforming border enforcement into a full-scale military operation, the US Northern Command, which controls US military forces within North America, ordered a third US missile-firing destroyer, the USS Stockdale, to join the USS Spruance and USS Gravelly on southern border operations. The Stockdale left the US Navy base in San Diego to join a Coast Guard flotilla. The destroyer had been previously deployed to the US Central Command and shot down drones operated by the Houthis in Yemen, over the Red Sea.



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