

Pentagon extends troop deployment at Mexican border until September

By Matthew Taylor
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The Pentagon announced on Monday that it will extend the deployment of troops along the border with Mexico until September 30. There are currently 2,350 soldiers stationed at the border, down from an initial 5,900. They had originally been scheduled to leave at the end of January.

The extension was requested by the Department of Homeland Security on December 27 and approved by the Pentagon, which announced the news in a one-paragraph statement that read “DOD is transitioning its support at the southwestern border from hardening ports of entry to mobile surveillance and detection, as well as concertina wire emplacement between ports of entry. DOD will continue to provide aviation support.”

The troops had initially been deployed at the beginning of November, in a blatant and provocative political stunt by President Trump, who falsely claimed that the increased militarization at the border was necessary to protect the US from an oncoming “invasion,” a caravan of Central American refugees that the president slandered, in typical fashion, as criminals and terrorists. This illegal action on the part of the Trump administration was aimed at mobilizing his fascist base in advance of the November midterm elections and preparing the military for a broader assault on an increasingly restive working class.

Since the troops arrived in November there have been multiple assaults upon immigrants attempting to seek asylum by Customs and Border Patrol, assisted in some capacity by the military. Most recently, CBP agents fired plastic ammunition and tear gas canisters at a group of migrants who attempted to cross the border at Tijuana, on New Year’s day. This follows a similar attack conducted by CBP, along with the military, in November.

Since Trump took office in 2017 there have been at least 22 immigrants who have died while in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Additionally, three children have died in the custody of CBP in recent months, including an eight-year-old, a seven-year-old, and a one-year-old. Most have died due to the abusive and neglectful conditions they are imprisoned under.

The Trump administration also announced that it will expand the capacity of the Homestead detention center in South Florida from 1,350 migrant children to 2,350. Most youth detained at the facility, 94 percent, have been separated from their families at the southern border, according to a statement made by former Florida Senator Bill Nelson. Because the youth prison has been deemed a “temporary” detention facility it does not fall under state laws that are aimed at ensuring minimal levels of child welfare.

The Homestead facility will hold many youths formerly detained in the tent city prison in Tornillo, Texas, which held 2,800 children. That facility was officially closed at the end of 2017 after the company that had been tasked with operating the prison declined to renew its contract after media exposures of the concentration camp-like conditions at the facility.

The Homestead detention center was first opened by the Obama administration in 2016 but was later closed. According to reporting in the *Miami New Times*, the facility was then quietly reopened by the Trump administration. The *New Times* has also revealed that ICE officials arrest Homestead prisoners when they reach their 18th birthday and transport them to adult detention centers, an illegal act which the agency routinely carries out at detention facilities around the country.

According to the *New York Times*, there are currently

10,500 migrant youth held in federal detention centers across the country, down from a high of 14,700 in December.

The brutal conditions facing migrant children, many separated from their parents at the border, were briefly given exposure by the corporate media last year after several leaked audio and video recordings that detailed the inhumane treatment they were subject to were released to the public. This inspired outrage amongst the US population, but the Democratic Party which is equally culpable in the attack on immigrants, buried the issue in the 2018 election campaign.

Now the crisis-ridden Trump administration is reviving the border issue to whip up its fascistic base. The transfer of migrant children from Texas, where many of their parents are detained, to south Florida, can only be interpreted as a deliberate act of cruelty designed to prolong the reuniting of families and demonstrate the administration's capacity for brutality.

The ongoing imprisonment of migrant youth, along with the extension of the troop deployment to the southern border, which will almost surely be renewed indefinitely, comes at a time when the president has threatened to declare a national emergency and shift funds appropriated for the Pentagon to build a border wall, a dictatorial act.

Trump's threat to declare a state of emergency has been met with a tepid response from the Democratic party, who are essentially in agreement with his immigration policies and have offered nearly \$2 billion to fund "border security."

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