

US Troops at the Border: From Bodyguards to Medical Assistants?

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U.S. officials told Reuters there is a proposal to keep troops at the border to help with medical screenings of Central American migrants.

President Donald Trump's administration is considering giving United States troops on the border with Mexico the authority to carry out medical screening of migrants, U.S. officials told Reuters Tuesday.

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The proposal, which is still in draft form and circulating within the administration, would involve the military in screenings for things like illness and injury only if U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency personnel were overwhelmed and unable to do so on their own, the officials said.

The proposal would expand the mission for the Pentagon, which said previously it did not expect its forces to directly interact with migrants, despite calls by policy experts and retired military personnel to send the troops back home. On Monday, retired Maj. Gen. Peter S. Cooke called the domestic deployment “extremely

unwise” and an unnecessary burden on soldiers which “does affect our [national security](#)” while Ned Price, director of policy and communications at National Security Action and former advisor to President Barack Obama criticized the deployment of troop calling it "nothing more than what I would call a political stunt."

The Pentagon declined to comment on internal deliberations.

U.S. military duties on the border, including stringing up barbed wire and building temporary housing, have been aimed at supporting CBP personnel.

One U.S. official said that under the latest proposal, U.S. troops would carry out medical screenings only if other officials, such as from state and local governments or the National Guard, were not available or overwhelmed.

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On Monday, Reuters reported that Trump was likely to give U.S. troops authority to protect immigration agents stationed along the U.S. border with Mexico if they come under threat from migrants seeking to cross into the U.S., a role he had hinted at on various occasions, including during an earlier press conference in which he said (hypothetical) stones thrown by migrants would be regarded as bullets. Later, [Trump had to backtrack](#) on that comment.

The U.S. officials who spoke to Reuters did so on condition of anonymity because Trump has not yet signed off on the idea.

The number of deployed troops are at around 5,800. Trump's critics have criticized his decision to deploy troops as a response to the humanitarian crisis that has forced thousands to flee Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. On several occasions, the U.S. president has used dehumanizing language to refer to entire families looking for asylum as they flee violence and poverty.

About 6,000 Central Americans have reached the Mexican border cities of Tijuana and Mexicali, according to local officials. More Central American migrants are making their way toward Tijuana. And a last group of migrants is making their way to Mexico. According to teleSUR correspondents at least 20 members of the last caravan made it into Mexico Tuesday.

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