

# Militarize the Southern Border: Joe Biden Strikes Deal with Mexico and Central American States to Curb Migration

Unprecedented levels of people attempting to cross the Southern border while thousands remain in detention

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*A crisis of migration into the United States from Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras has resulted in negotiations by the White House with the governments of these countries aimed at preventing people from crossing the southern border.*

During the month of March, a record number of migrant workers and children attempted to enter the U.S. while many are being housed in overcrowded and unsafe detention facilities in Texas.

The administration of incumbent **President Joe Biden** announced on April 12 that after discussions with the governments of the above-mentioned states, the military and police forces in Mexico and Central America would strengthen their prevention efforts to halt migrants from these respective countries. After the exposure of the horrid conditions under which children and adults were living in after being captured and detained by U.S. Custom and Border Protection (CBP), the president appointed **Vice President Kamala Harris** as the point person for resolving the immediate situation.

Nonetheless, it is not clear whether these new measures will halt the flow of people trying to cross the border. The ongoing problems of social underdevelopment, climate change and the domination of Latin American economies by U.S. imperialism will still prompt millions to leave their countries to seek what they believe to be prospects for employment and security. The problem of migration and the dangers inherent in the transport of human beings by traffickers, is a worldwide phenomenon stretching from Central Asia to the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.

Moreover, many seeking to cross into the U.S. are not from Mexico and Central America. There are growing numbers of people from Africa and other geo-political regions which have made their ways to Brazil, Colombia and Panama as a transit route into the U.S.

Recent reports on the foreign policy orientation of the Biden administration in relationship to this burgeoning political problem places the onus of responsibility on the neighboring states without addressing the fundamental orientation of Washington towards Latin America which

has been centuries in the making. White House Press Secretary **Jen Psaki** revealed the new deal in a briefing on April 12.

[An article](#) summarizing the Biden administration approach says that:

“The agreements, which Psaki said were reached over the last several weeks, aim ‘to make it more difficult to make the journey’ for migrants hoping to reach the United States, and to make crossing borders more difficult. Mexico agreed to keep 10,000 troops along its southern border, which officials believe will result in twice as many migrant interdictions per day. Guatemala agreed to send an additional 1,500 police and military officers to its southern border and will also establish 12 checkpoints along identified migratory routes across the country. Honduras will send 7,000 police and military to ‘disperse a large contingent of migrants,’ Psaki said. The news of the border agreements between the four countries was first revealed by Tyler Moran, special assistant to the President for immigration for the Domestic Policy Council, on MSNBC Monday morning.”

Consequently, the thrust of the Biden administration is to further militarize the southern border along with the security apparatuses of these targeted states. The responsibility for curbing migration is being shifted to the governments of Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras where U.S. economic and political policies have been detrimental to the workers and farmers of these countries. The blatant interference in the internal affairs of these states coupled with a series of trade deals including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) during the 1990s and the revised version altered under the former administration of President Donald Trump, have devastated their national economies.

### **A Militarized Approach to a Crisis of Underdevelopment**

Psaki said clearly during the April 12 briefing at the White House that the purpose of the new policy is to make the journey and border crossing more difficult for migrants seeking to flee from human rights abuses, food deficits and lack of the ability to earn a living. Providing incentives for the police and military forces of these three countries heightens the potential for migrants to be subjected to brutality and extortion. There have been complaints over the years related to the excesses of the security forces in Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras.

Even if the migrants are able to cross the border and elude the CBP agents, they continue to be hunted down by the authorities. Thousands now are being held in facilities which violate even the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regulations on curbing the spread of COVID-19. The U.S. is experiencing a surge in coronavirus infections causing even more distress for healthcare systems where intensive care units of hospitals are rapidly filling up with patients suffering from the disease.

[The Guardian newspaper](#) noted in regard to the current situation involving U.S. policy which emphasizes a punitive approach saying:

“Previously militarized attempts to prevent movement in the region have not reduced the number of people traveling north through Mexico, but instead forced migrants to take riskier routes through remote regions, and exposed them to a heightened risk of robbery, rape, abduction and death. Mexicans represented the largest proportion of people encountered by the U.S. border patrol, and nearly all were single adults. Arrivals of people from Honduras and

Guatemala were second and third, respectively, and more than half of the people from those countries were families or children traveling alone.”

Figures supplied by the U.S. government reveals that 4,200 children are being held in custody by the CBP. Another 16,000 are being housed in federal shelters administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Federal laws prohibit unaccompanied children from being detained by CBP authorities for more than 72 hours.

Since February 22, the Biden White House has announced the opening of 8 emergency influx sites for children in the state of Texas. These facilities have a capacity to hold up to 14,000 children.

### **Prospects for Legislative Reforms**

Even though the numbers of migrant adults and children seeking to enter the U.S. has grown exponentially over the last three months, it remains unclear as to whether the Senate will adopt the two immigration reform bills passed recently by the House of Representatives. The Dream and Promise Act of 2021 and The Farm Workforce Modernization Act provides a complicated model for the “legalization” of those brought to the U.S. as children and those who work in the agricultural sector of the U.S. economy. The stalemate surrounding these issues extend back for more than a decade. (See [this](#) and [this](#))

During the administration of former President George W. Bush, Jr. (2001-2009), the introduction of punitive legislation against immigrants served to spark a nationwide movement led by people from Latin America and other geo-political regions. There were “Days Without Immigrants” beginning in 2006, when millions struck demanding an end to draconian laws and the brutality of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, a key division of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The resurrection of May Day during 2006-2007, mobilized millions across the country under the banner of justice for migrants, the undocumented and workers in general.

With the passing of the Bush administration, President Barack Obama in his first term (2009-2013) earned a reputation as a fierce enforcer of the existing racist immigration laws directed towards the undocumented. Entire communities were terrorized by ICE agents when raids were carried out on workplaces and homes often living children unattended. The Obama administration deported more people from the U.S. than any previous presidential regime in U.S. history. Although there were discussions during 2012 about passing an immigration bill, the details of the plan represented a retreat from the gains made as a result of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

Biden was repeatedly questioned during the 2019-2020 campaign for the presidency about the nature of the immigration policy enacted while he was Vice President. At present there does not appear to be any fundamental differences in the Biden policy other than a pledge not to deport unaccompanied children. Nevertheless, the actual harm done to minors living in detention facilities and temporary shelters could damage them for life. However, children accompanied by adult migrants are being prevented from entering the U.S. and being returned to Mexico in the thousands.

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