



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations Subcommittee Chairwoman Kathleen Rice (D-NY)

Examining the Department of Defense's Deployment to the U.S.-Mexico Border June 20, 2019

Though DoD's presence on the border is not new, their support of DHS operations has indeed evolved over the past year. And right now, it would appear that this administration is testing the limits of that relationship. Since the first large group of migrants began traveling north from Central America in April of last year – fleeing violence, poverty, and persecution within their home countries – the President and DHS have relied heavily upon the DoD to support their border security operations.

It is important to note here that the April 2018 “caravan” – the President's principle reason for first deploying the National Guard – shrunk down from an estimated 1,500 migrants to approximately 300. Nevertheless, the President issued a memorandum at that time directing the Secretary of Defense to deploy as many as 4,000 National Guard troops to the southern border. And today, approximately 2,300 National Guard troops remain deployed in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California to support more than 16,000 Border Patrol agents who are also currently assigned to border region.

In early October 2018, there were more reports of another caravan originating in Central America. Despite advanced warning and ample time to plan and scale their response, CBP seemingly did not prepare for the surge in arrivals, nor did the department or ask Congress to increase its capacity so that it could more effectively process migrant families.

In fact, no such request was made of Congress until earlier this year. Instead, the President preferred a “show of force” and requested the deployment of 5,200 active duty military personnel to the southern border a week before the 2018 midterm elections. Most of these personnel were tasked with hardening ports of entry; providing aerial surveillance between ports of entry; as well as providing medical care, transportation, and other services to support Border Patrol. By December 2018, there wasn't much more for these troops to do, and their days were largely devoid of any meaningful duties. And recently, Congress was notified of similar deployment of for DoD personnel paint one mile of border barrier in California.

Personally, it's difficult to believe that the Administration is doing everything in its power to resolve the humanitarian crisis at our southern border when Congress receives notifications such as this one. In February, the President declared a national emergency after a 35-day government shutdown, which was caused over a fundamental disagreement over the necessity of a border wall. After Congress denied this funding request, the President sought to divert billions of dollars in previously appropriated defense funds to build this wall. And now, it seems the Administration is planning a multi-year deployment of active duty soldiers to the southern border. Taken together, these actions point to a steep escalation in the DoD's role at our southern border. And these policy decisions will have consequences and long-term effects. Broad questions remain about whether the actions this Administration has taken are an appropriate use of DoD and DHS resources.

Continued reliance by DHS on the DoD for handling the southern border will likely have ramifications on both departments' ability to carry out their respective missions. Both Departments are accountable to the American people though Congress, and I ask that both DHS and DoD leadership commit to transparency by sharing any and all requested information with this committee and the other oversight committees moving forward.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978