

Biden administration sending 1,500 more soldiers to Mexico border



The US's contentious Title 42 border policy is set to expire on May 11, and Washington is preparing for an anticipated increase in people trying to seek asylum at the border with Mexico [File: Jose Luis Gonzalez/Reuters]

Washington, May 2 (RHC)-- The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden is sending 1,500 additional soldiers to the United States border with Mexico as the country prepares for the lifting of contentious, pandemic-era restrictions later this month.

In a statement on Tuesday, the Pentagon said it had approved a request from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to send the added military personnel to the border for 90 days. The soldiers will perform “non-law enforcement duties” such as data entry and warehouse support, DHS said in an earlier statement, amid an “anticipated increase in migration” at the southwest U.S. border. “This support will free up DHS law enforcement personnel to perform their critical law enforcement missions,” the department said.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday afternoon, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre also confirmed that the additional Department of Defense personnel would perform “administrative tasks” at the frontier.

“They will not be performing law enforcement functions or interacting with immigrants or migrants,” Jean-Pierre said.

The move comes amid concerns that the end of Title 42, a controversial restriction first imposed by President Donald Trump in March 2020, will lead to a dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border in search of protection.

The policy, which is set to expire on May 11, has allowed U.S. authorities to rapidly turn away most migrants and refugees who arrive, without having to assess their asylum claims. It remains unclear when the additional U.S. soldiers would be deployed, but the force would add to an ongoing deployment of about 2,500 National Guard troops.

“This will absolutely send message of militarizing the border to deter migrants,” Gregory Chen, director of government relations at the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), said on Twitter on Tuesday, criticising the plan.

Asked about the U.S. troop deployment, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador told reporters that the U.S. is a sovereign nation and that Mexico respected its decisions.

The Biden administration has been trying to stem the flow of asylum seekers to its southern border for months, as the U.S. president – who is seeking re-election in 2024 – has faced criticism and political pressure from Republicans over the increased arrivals. In 2021, Vice President Kamala Harris told would-be migrants: “Do not come.”

In late April, Washington announced that it would open migration centres in several Latin American countries where people could apply for entry into the US away from the border. However, the administration also stated that it would expedite deportations of people, including families, seeking to enter the U.S. to petition for asylum. Under the new measures, those caught crossing irregularly would also be banned from re-entry for five years.

While Biden was critical of the anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric of the Trump administration, the Democratic president has been criticised by immigrant rights groups for keeping many of those policies in place and further restricting asylum during his time in office.

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