

Trump wants 4,000 troops at border; Mexico's president chides him as 'disrespectful'

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Thursday that he'll send as many as 4,000 troops to the U.S.-Mexico border until Congress relents on his demands for a massive border wall.

"Anywhere from 2,000 to 4,000," he told reporters aboard Air Force One as he returned from a quick visit to West Virginia, adding that "we'll probably keep them, or a large portion of them, until such time as we get the wall."

In Mexico, Trump's push for a troop surge at the border prompted President Enrique Peña Nieto to chastise him for straining the relationship with unfounded "threatening or disrespectful attitudes."

"If your recent statements are the result of frustration due to domestic policy issues, to your laws or to your Congress, it is to them that you should turn, not to Mexicans," he said in a national address in which he echoed condemnations from four contenders to succeed him next month.

It was an unusual show of unity fueled by resentment of Trump's bashing of immigrants and threats to scrap a trade deal.

"Something that brings together and unites absolutely all Mexicans is our certainty that nothing and no one stands above the dignity of Mexico," said Peña Nieto.

Trump's announcement Tuesday caught aides, lawmakers and Mexican officials by surprise. The White House has provided few details since he declared that as long as Congress refuses to provide wall funding, he will use military assets to block drug trafficking and illegal immigration.

Top aides had not mentioned the possibility of a troop surge in the days leading up to the announcement, even as they discussed Trump's demands for the wall and for enhanced funding and legal authority for border security and immigration enforcement.

Critics, including the ACLU and a chorus of immigrant advocates, accuse Trump of manufacturing a crisis, and rashly deploying the military out of frustration that Congress has stymied his signature campaign pledge.

Mission needs not drafted

In a sign of the haste with which the troop surge was unveiled, Homeland Security officials haven't yet drafted a list of mission needs, which will be used to set personnel targets.

"The Pentagon has to work with the states to get the right kind of resources and the right combination and then we owe the Pentagon a full and complete list of our requirements," Border Patrol chief Ron Vitiello told Fox News.

"We're going to coordinate. They will provide us with the requirements, and then, from that, we'll determine how many, and what's the mission, and how many we'll deploy," the chief Pentagon spokeswoman, Dana White, told reporters.

The comments suggested that Trump has a target in mind that hasn't yet been supported by expert analysis and advice.

Trump sought \$25 billion to replace existing border wall and expand the barrier from its current 654 miles. He said Tuesday that he seeks no more than 700 to 800 miles of barrier along the 1,954-mile southwest border. Last week, Vitiello cited a 1,000-mile target.

Both are well shy of the impression Trump gave during the campaign, when he promised to build a "big, beautiful wall" at least 30 feet high, and to make Mexico pay for it.

Congress provided \$1.6 billion in the \$1.3 trillion budget Trump signed last month — enough for about 100 miles of barrier, two-thirds of it replacement for existing fence. Slow progress has proved an embarrassment for Trump, as has Mexico's adamant and public refusal to bow to his demands.

Tension with Mexico

Tensions have run high between Trump and Peña Nieto. Traditionally, a summit

between the U.S. and Mexican presidents is a top priority after an election in either country. Peña Nieto canceled a visit to Washington early in Trump's term when the American refused to disavow his demand for a border wall that Mexico would pay for.

The two presidents could meet next week at the Summit of the Americas in Lima, Peru, but a senior White House sidestepped the question by noting previous meetings with Mexican counterparts by Jared Kushner and at the secretary of state level. Kushner is Trump's son-in-law.

Dallas Rep. Jeb Hensarling was among the Republicans praising Trump's move to put troops at the border.

"As any Texan can tell you, our national borders are not secure enough," he said in a statement. "It is refreshing to see the Trump administration take bold action to protect our national and economic security."

Tea party activist Jenny Beth Martin also lauded the impending troop deployment, citing — as he did — a caravan of Central Americans walking through Mexico in an annual protest of working conditions.

"President Trump is doing exactly what a president should do by sending our troops to the southern border as a caravan of many thousands of potential illegal immigrants approaches our country," she said in a statement.

Trump signed an order Wednesday night authorizing a National Guard deployment.

The memo paints a dire picture — a "drastic surge of illegal activity on the southern border" -involving drugs, gangs and illegal immigrants that imperils American safety and sovereignty. It speaks of "lawlessness at the border" and a "point of crisis" that justifies military action.

Critics view such descriptions as exaggerations.

"Our American way of life hinges on our ability as a Nation to adequately and effectively enforce our laws and protect our borders," Trump's memo says.

Federal law bars the use of military for civil law enforcement, including immigration law. But troops can be used to free up Border Patrol resources.

Pentagon spokeswoman White said that “the National Guard’s efforts will include aviation, engineering, surveillance, communications, vehicle maintenance and logistical support.”

President George W. Bush sent 6,000 National Guard troops to the border for a two-year mission that began in 2006. President Barack Obama sent 1,200 guard troops in 2010.

Border governors must agree

Border state governors would need to agree to requests for National Guard troops.

Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen said Wednesday that she had conferred with the four governors.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, embraced the troop deployment. Both are Republicans. Neither had publicly requested troops before Trump’s announcement.

New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez, also a Republican, was more cautious, saying only that she appreciated being consulted.

California Gov. Jerry Brown, a Democrat who has fought the Trump administration in court over the border wall proposal and immigration enforcement, was wary, and it’s unclear if he will go along with Trump’s push for a troop surge. Speaking for Brown’s administration, Lt. Col. Tom Keegan of the California National Guard said the proposal “will be promptly reviewed to determine how best we can assist our federal partners. We look forward to more detail, including funding, duration and end state.”

For days, Trump aides were unable to say how many troops the president wants at the border, how long the mission will last, when it will start, and how he would define success.

Texas has had guardsmen and state troopers assigned to border security for a number of years. California currently has 55 guardsmen assigned to the border.

Source: <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2018/04/05/trump-wants-4000-troops-us-mexico-border-wall-gets-built>

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