

4-18-2018

Trump's Decision to Send National Guard Troops to Border Angers Mexicans

Carlos Navarro

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

Recommended Citation

Navarro, Carlos. "Trump's Decision to Send National Guard Troops to Border Angers Mexicans." (2018).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/6425>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Trump's Decision to Send National Guard Troops to Border Angers Mexicans

by Carlos Navarro

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2018-04-18

US President Donald Trump's directive to four states to send National Guard personnel to the US-Mexico border to perform immigration enforcement duties reinforced the antipathies in Mexico toward the US executive, attracting strong reactions from President Enrique Peña Nieto and from the candidates in Mexico's upcoming presidential elections, particularly front-runner Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

On April 5, Trump directed Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California to deploy 2,000 to 4,000 members of the National Guard to the border region to help protect against an expected influx of undocumented immigrants. The move, one in a series of pronouncements that Trump made on immigration during the first week of April, was a reaction to reports that a caravan of more than 1,000 Central Americans was heading to the US via Mexico.

In his first comment on this issue, sent via a Twitter message, Trump warned Peña Nieto that the US would unilaterally drop out of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) if Mexico did not stop the caravan. The US, Mexico, and Canada have held a series of difficult negotiations on NAFTA and are far from reaching an agreement to revise the trilateral accord ([SourceMex, Oct. 18, 2017](#), and [Jan. 10, 2018](#)).

The organizers of the caravan, whose numbers were swollen by Honduran citizens fleeing the violence that has followed a contentious presidential election in their country ([NotiCen, Feb. 8, 2018](#), and [April 5, 2018](#)), decided to make Mexico City the final destination after a brief stop in the city of Puebla. Organizers said the extremely large size of the group made logistics difficult.

"When we saw the numbers, we were shocked," organizer Irineo Mujica told The Washington Post. "It's impossible to travel with this many people."

Some members of the caravan said they would try to enter the US in smaller groups, but many others said they would seek asylum in Mexico.

The decision of the caravan organizers to make Mexico City a final destination caused Trump to change his tune about Mexico's immigration efforts. "The Caravan is largely broken up thanks to the strong immigration laws of Mexico and their willingness to use them so as not to cause a giant scene at our Border," Trump wrote in a tweet. The US president also took credit for policies that have limited border crossings.

Trump's praise for Mexico did not keep him from using the caravan to bolster his plan to stop the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which was put into place under former President Barack Obama (2009-2017) to protect US-born children of undocumented immigrants ([SourceMex, Dec. 10, 2014](#)). The news of the movement of Central Americans to the US also prompted Trump to renew his call for construction of a massive barrier wall along the US-Mexico border ([SourceMex, Jan. 18, 2017](#), [March 22, 2017](#), [Feb. 21, 2018](#)).

Even with the seemingly conciliatory stance toward Peña Nieto and Mexico, Trump moved ahead with his plan to send military personnel to the border. He proposed the measure even though the US Constitution prohibits the use of military personnel for law-enforcement duties. Rather than deploy members of the regular Army, however, Trump's proposal involved the use of hundreds of members of the National Guard, who would come primarily from the four states that border Mexico. Texas and Arizona immediately committed personnel, but California and New Mexico expressed reservations.

The role the National Guard will play at the border is uncertain, since the personnel will not be armed and will not be allowed to interact directly with immigrants.

"It's just not particularly cost-effective or useful," the daily US newspaper USA Today said in an editorial. "Members of the National Guard are not able to make arrests, are not trained in immigration enforcement and—in some cases—do not particularly relish being called up, or away from training, to play a backup role."

However, there is precedent to Trump's decision, as two other US presidents made use of the National Guard at the US-Mexico border on a limited basis. In 2006, then-President George W. Bush (2001-2009) deployed 6,000 National Guard troops to help build infrastructure in the border region ([SourceMex, May 31, 2006](#)). And in 2010, Obama sent National Guard personnel to conduct surveillance and intelligence work to help Border Patrol agents track down immigrants and to assist in confiscating narcotics ([SourceMex, April 27, 2011](#)).

An act of hostility

Critics in Mexico said Trump is intent on expanding the barrier along the US-Mexico border, a promise he made during the presidential campaign ([SourceMex, Jan. 18, 2017](#), and [March 22, 2017](#)). However, they noted that the move to send the National Guard to the border reflects frustration with the process.

"Every time Donald Trump wants to reaffirm support among his base, he mentions the wall," Mauricio Farah Gebara, a specialist on human rights and migration, said in a guest column in the daily newspaper Milenio. "Knowing that the construction is far from becoming a reality, Trump now says, 'We are going to guard our border with the military.'"

Farah Gebara added that Trump's inconsistent actions diminish the force of his statements.

"However, this does not override his threatening intentions," Farah Gebara said. "The mention of a troop deployment to the border is an affront to a country that is a friend and partner."

And writing in the daily newspaper Excélsior, columnist Francisco Garfias said, "The open hostility that the executive in the White House has displayed against his neighbors to the south has angered Mexicans. We are tired of his threats and the lack of respect of this egomaniac and supremacist president of the US."

A vigorous response by Peña Nieto

Trump's proposal to send troops to the border elicited an uncharacteristically strong response from Peña Nieto, who until now had exercised caution in his comments about the US president, an approach that has been strongly criticized ([SourceMex, Feb. 22, 2017](#), and [Feb. 21, 2018](#)).

In a statement shortly after Trump announced his decision, Peña Nieto called on the US president to explain what the National Guard would be doing at the border. He then offered his strongest criticism yet of Trump, saying that his administration would not tolerate threats to Mexico's dignity or sovereignty.

"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 to, not to Mexicans," Peña Nieto said, adding that Mexico was ready to negotiate with the US but would not do so out of fear.

"As Mexicans, we may disagree among ourselves, especially during election periods, but we will always be united when it comes to defending our country's dignity and sovereignty," he said.

In his column in the daily business newspaper *El Financiero*, Pablo Hiriart called Peña Nieto's response to Donald Trump "perhaps the most energetic statement from a Mexican politician to the sitting president of the US in decades." He called the statement "strong, serious, and filled with a dignity that should make us very proud."

A topic of Mexican electoral campaigns

Trump's positions on immigration, trade, and other issues affecting Mexico have become central to the electoral campaigns in Mexico ahead of the vote scheduled for July 1 ([SourceMex, Feb. 21, 2018](#)), and analysts suggest the latest controversy has added to the heated electoral rhetoric.

"The president of the US has just added a touch of pepper to the campaigns," columnist Enrique Campos Suárez wrote in the daily business newspaper *El Economista*.

Analysts generally agree that López Obrador, who represents the *Juntos Haremos Historia* (Together We Will Make History) coalition, led primarily by the center-left *Movimiento Regeneración Nacional* (Morena), is the candidate likely to benefit the most from Trump's latest affront to Mexico. López Obrador has consistently led public opinion polls for months, because he is seen as the one politician who could best stand up to Trump ([SourceMex, Feb. 22, 2017](#)).

"It's very likely that López Obrador will take the most advantage of this," noted Jesús Cantú, a political scientist at the *Tecnológico de Monterrey*. "For the everyday Mexican, this represents an aggression and a position of weakness for the government."

In an interview with Bloomberg news service, Carlos Petersen, an analyst with the Washington-based *Eurasia Group*, said López Obrador was in a good position to capitalize on the controversy.

"It strengthens his position that he's been critical of how the government has managed this, and that he could do a better job," Petersen said.

López Obrador spoke on the topic during a campaign speech in Nuevo Laredo.

"[Trump] is using all this campaign against Mexico as propaganda, that is the only way I can explain that he's trying to send military forces to the border," he said. "This great threat on the southern border of the United States that he says is there, does not exist."

Ricardo Anaya, a member of the conservative *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) representing the *Por México al Frente* (Mexico in Front) coalition, came out strongly in support of a resolution passed by the Mexican Senate calling on the Peña Nieto government to end cooperation with the

US on migration and security. The coalition also includes the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD).

“You cannot negotiate or cooperate with threats,” Anaya said. “We must make it clear to President Trump that Mexico and the United States can continue to have a profitable relationship, of mutual benefit, or move into a confrontational relationship, where we all lose.”

José Antonio Meade, representing the Todos por México (Everyone for Mexico) coalition, which includes the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM), issued a statement via Twitter expressing solidarity with candidates López Obrador, Anaya, and Margarita Zavala.

“I firmly support Presidente @EPN, as well as the positions of @RicardoAnayaC, @lopezobrador, and @Mzavalagc in defense of our sovereignty and national dignity in the face of the threats made by @realDonaldTrump,” he wrote.

Zavala, formerly a member of the PAN and Mexico’s first lady between 2006 and 2012, had been the only independent candidate to qualify for the election, but Nuevo León Gov. Jaime Rodríguez Calderón won a challenge that will allow him to run as an independent as well. Electoral authorities had initially ruled that Rodríguez Calderón had come up short on signatures to qualify for the ballot, but the federal electoral court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación) ruled that he should be included in the ballot.

The latest public opinion polls suggest that López Obrador has consolidated his lead. A poll conducted by the daily newspaper Reforma on April 12-15 showed López Obrador with 42% support, compared with 32% for Anaya, 18% for Meade, 5% for Zavala, and 3% for Rodríguez Calderón.

The five candidates will hold their first national debate on April 22. The general themes of the debate include public safety and violence; corruption and impunity; and democracy, pluralism, and vulnerable groups. Even though the Mexico-US relationship is not a central theme, the topic is sure to come up in some form.

-- End --