

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 20, 2018

The Honorable James N. Mattis  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Mattis:

We are deeply disturbed by the overt politicization of the military and the lack of evidence to justify the deployment of active duty troops to confront the migrant caravan before the midterm elections. This politically-motivated mission misuses active duty servicemembers and wastes Department of Defense (DOD) resources, both of which could compromise military readiness in the face of a true national security threat and heighten the risk of a confrontation between asylum-seekers and armed servicemembers. We request a NORTHCOM briefing and written justification for deploying up to 15,000 active duty troops to the border. In the absence of such justification, we urge you to curb the unprecedented escalation of DOD involvement in immigration enforcement and end unnecessary deployments to support Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) activities.

On October 29, 2018, NORTHCOM issued an inflammatory fragmentary order (FRAGO) that exaggerated the migrant threat and contradicted intelligence assessments reported to have been released the same day. The FRAGO asserted: "the security of the United States is imperiled by a drastic surge of illegal drugs, dangerous gang activity and extension illegal immigration threatens the safety of citizens and undermines the rule of law." But, according to press reports, a NORTHCOM assessment emphasized that the number of migrants arriving at the border is likely to decrease as the caravan approaches the United States, and that DOD does not anticipate terrorist infiltration or significant criminal gang involvement. Rather than a drastic surge in illegal activity, the reported assessments and historical trends indicate a potential humanitarian crisis instead. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) emphasized that over 270 migrants have criminal histories, but an anonymous senior Defense Department official was quoted in the press acknowledging that the Department has yet to receive confirmation of these claims.

Although the incendiary FRAGO language is clearly inconsistent with the reported security conditions and intelligence assessments, active duty troops established vehicle convoys and tent cities to provide the same logistical, clerical, and support jobs that National Guard units deployed to the border already perform. It is unclear why thousands of active duty troops are needed to provide additional logistical support to process a dwindling caravan of asylum seekers, particularly given that the troops deployed are likely to substantially outnumber the incoming

migrants. There is also a clear lack of proof to support assertions that American national security is imperiled by these asylum-seekers or that current migration patterns represent “a point of crisis.”

Our concerns about this seemingly disproportionate military response to the migrant caravan are amplified by the obvious political agenda at play. Both the deployment timing and mission name reveal a blatant partisan ploy. In response to President Trump’s promise to send “the real military” to secure our borders, approximately 5,200 active duty troops were deployed to support “Operation Faithful Patriot” by November 5, 2018 – the day before the midterm elections. But by November 7, 2018, the Pentagon announced the mission would be re-named “border support” given that “Faithful Patriot” conveyed undeniably political undertones. Such capricious partisanship and manipulation of military troops for electoral gain does a dangerous disservice to our men and women in uniform. Servicemembers must never be used as pawns in a political agenda – a practice that will undoubtedly and irreparably harm servicemember morale.

DOD must account for both the end state and objectives of this mission and provide written justification for the use of active duty troops at the southwest border. We request a final cost estimate for the mission, the defense budget account or source that will fund this deployment, and a timeline for any CBP reimbursement of DOD expenditures. Further, DOD must publicize measurements of effectiveness and performance, document any DOD role in policy implementation, and provide written confirmation that this diversion of DOD resources will not compromise the ability of U.S. Armed Forces to respond to real national security threats.

As Secretary of Defense, we urge you to protect the apolitical, non-partisan nature of the U.S. Armed Forces and advocate for military strategy that will protect this country against national security threats. In addition to a NORTHCOM briefing to be scheduled no later than Thursday, December 6, 2018, we request any written intelligence or threat assessments that justify the deployment of active duty troops to the border, or any documented verification to support the assertions that the migrant caravan jeopardizes U.S. national security. Unless DOD is able to provide irrefutable justification for active duty servicemembers’ support to CBP, we encourage you to refrain from extending the deployments of active duty servicemembers currently stationed at the border or deploying additional units. Thank you for your immediate attention to this issue and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate



BERNARD SANDERS  
United States Senate



EDWARD J. MARKEY  
United States Senate



ROBERT MENENDEZ  
United States Senate



BENJAMIN L. CARDIN  
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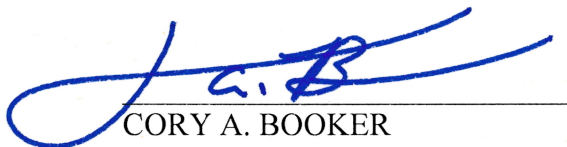
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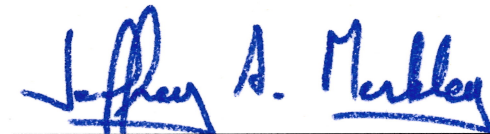
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