

U.S. Takes Steps to Tighten Mexican Border

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Byline: By ERIC LICHTBLAU

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Body

Federal officials have become increasingly worried about a surge in violence and instability along the Arizona-Mexico **border** and will begin what they describe as a major air and ground initiative to help keep out illegal immigrants, drug smugglers and possibly terrorists, officials said on Monday.

The \$10 million plan, to be announced on Tuesday by the Department of Homeland Security, will include the first use of unmanned aircraft for **border** patrol, the addition of several hundred agents and the creation of seven tent complexes to detain illegal **border** crossers.

Asa Hutchinson, an under secretary for domestic security, said in an interview that a **tightening** of security in **border** areas in California, Texas and elsewhere had led smugglers to turn in increasing numbers to Arizona -- often with violent results.

"This is not a secure **border**," Mr. Hutchinson said. "Arizona has become the chokepoint. This is our current battleground."

But some human rights and immigrants' advocates believe that broader economic and political changes -- rather than a law enforcement crackdown -- are the answer.

"Our **border** is in utter chaos here in Arizona," said the Rev. Robin Hoover, head of a Tucson group called Humane **Borders** that provides relief for migrants, "but a Berlin Wall is not the way to solve the problem."

Moreover, the unmanned aircraft face technical and safety hurdles. A report in January by the Congressional Research Service said that drones, as the aircraft are commonly known, offer several attractive features for **border** patrol work and can identify "a potentially hostile target the size of a milk carton at an altitude of 60,000 feet." But their use is also hindered by accident rates more than 100 times that of manned aircraft, according to the report.

"I think the jury is still out" on unmanned aircraft, Mr. Hutchinson acknowledged, but he added that "we're looking for new tools."

Homeland security officials expect to begin using the remote-controlled aircraft in June to supplement manned air and ground patrols. It will be the first time the drones will be used for **border** patrol in the **United States**, other than on a trial basis, officials said.

The officials would not give details about the drones, including their numbers or how frequently they would patrol.

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The unmanned aircraft will allow federal officials to spot crossers along parts of the more than 300 miles of the often-desolate **border** in Arizona that are not regularly patrolled, said David Aguilar, who is chief **border** patrol agent in Tucson.

Federal officials also plan to expand their patrols with helicopters and manned airplanes, create a new interagency network to coordinate the initiative, and add 200 permanent **border** patrol agents and 60 temporary agents trained in search and rescue operations. The increase will bring the number of **border** agents in Tucson to more than 1,900.

Officials will also create seven air-conditioned tent complexes to house and detain some immigrants until they can be sent home, rather than freeing them before court appearances and risking having them flee, Mr. Hutchinson said.

Homeland Security officials said they expected to spend \$10 million in the next six months on the additional personnel and technology.

"This is going to make a tremendous difference," said Mr. Aguilar, who will run the interagency effort. "It will be a very different focus."

The past few months have seen a spasm of violence and apprehensions along the Arizona **border**, even as illegal **border** crossings in other parts of the country have dropped.

Border Patrol agents in Arizona apprehended nearly 200,000 people from last October to early March, a rise of 34 percent over the same period a year earlier. And seizures of marijuana at the **border** were up 17 percent, Mr. Aguilar said.

With the influx have come more immigrant deaths in the desert -- more than 200 last year by Mr. Hoover's **s** count, many because of the heat. There have also been execution-style shootings, tortures and kidnappings that law enforcement officials blame on human smuggling rings. Four people died in a shootout between immigrant smugglers on an Arizona interstate last November.

Mr. Hutchinson described the smugglers and other traffickers in immigrants and drugs across the Arizona **border** as "greedier, more ruthless and more violent" than before. "These are people who have no regard for anyone's **s** safety," he said.

He added that the potential problems went beyond drugs and illegal immigrants. "Any time you have vulnerabilities at the **border**, you have to worry about terrorists **taking** advantage of that too," he said.

But Mr. Hoover, whose group provides water stations in the Arizona desert for immigrants, said resourceful traffickers would always find a way to get across the **border** unless officials looked at the root causes of immigration problems.

"It's **s** like putting rocks in a river -- the water just goes around it," he said. "You can show off a lot of new technology and more men and women in uniform, but it's **s** all just more of the same."

Death Penalty Sought for Driver

HOUSTON, March 15 (AP) -- Federal prosecutors said Monday they would seek the death penalty against the driver of a truck in which 19 illegal immigrants suffocated last year.

Prosecutors say Tyrone Williams, 33, of Schenectady, N.Y., drove more than 70 illegal immigrants from Mexico, Central America and the Dominican Republic on May 13 from the Rio Grande Valley toward Houston. Prosecutors

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say that when the immigrants began succumbing to the heat in the trailer, Mr. Williams abandoned it 100 miles southwest of Houston. Seventeen immigrants were found dead inside the truck. Two others died later.

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Graphic

Photo: Don Watt of the **Border** Patrol on duty near Nogales, Ariz., in January. Several hundred more agents will be added to secure the **border**. (Photo by Agence France-Presse -- Getty Images)

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