

Bush to call for Guard at the border Supporting role / Thousands of troops would back up civilian patrol

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Byline: By Nedra Pickler THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Body

President George W. **Bush** will **call** for **thousands** of National **Guard troops** to be deployed along the **border** with Mexico in **support** of **patrols** aimed at keeping out illegal immigrants, White House officials said Sunday on the eve of an Oval Office address announcing the plan.

White House aides worked into the night Sunday to iron out details of the proposal and allay concerns among lawmakers that using **troops** to man the **border** would further burden an overextended military.

Two White House officials said **Bush** would propose using **troops** as a stopgap measure while the **Border Patrol** builds **up** its resources. The **troops** would play a supportive **role** to **Border Patrol** agents, who would maintain primary responsibility for physically **guarding** the **border**.

The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity before the address tonight at 7 St. Louis time.

The officials would not say how many **troops** **Bush** wanted to use, except that it would be in the **thousands** but less than an estimate of as many as 10,000 being discussed at the Pentagon.

Bush's national security adviser, Stephen Hadley, would not confirm that using National **Guard troops** was the plan but said it was one of the options the president was considering. But he described the same scenario.

"It's not about militarization of the **border**," Hadley said on CNN's "Late Edition." "It's about assisting the **civilian Border Patrol** in doing their job, providing intelligence, providing **support**, logistics **support** and training and these sorts of things."

Bush's National **Guard** plan is aimed at winning **support** for broader immigration changes from conservatives in Congress. **Bush's** main goal is to allow foreigners to get temporary work permits to take low-paying jobs -- an idea favored by many businesses. But many conservatives want a tougher approach on illegal immigrants trying to sneak into the country.

About 100 National **Guard troops** are serving on the **border** to assist with counterdrug operations, heavy equipment **support** and other functions.

"I think what it would be is simply expanding the kind of thing that has already been done in the past in order to provide a bit of a stopgap as the **Border Patrol** build **up** their capacity to deal with this challenge," Hadley said.

Bush gave the same message to Mexican President Vicente Fox, who **called** Sunday to express concern about what he **called** the possibility of a "militarized" **border** between the two nations. **Bush** assured Fox that any military

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support would be administrative and logistical and would come from the National Guard and not the Army, according to a news release from Fox's office.

Criticism of the National Guard plan came Sunday from Democrats, but also an important Republican negotiator in the immigration debate -- Sen. Chuck Hagel of Nebraska. He said National Guard troops cannot secure the border over the long term and that he does not think it is wise even in the short term.

"We've got National Guard members on their second, third and fourth tours in Iraq," Hagel said. "We have stretched our military as thin as we have ever seen it in modern times. And what in the world are we talking about here, sending a National Guard that we may not have any capacity to send up to or down to protect borders? That's not their role."

Hagel said the bill under debate in the Senate that he helped write would double the 12,000-strong Border Patrol force over the next five years. "That's the way to fix it, not further stretching the National Guard," he said on ABC's "This Week."

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., said he supported using the National Guard on the Mexican border.

"We've got to secure our borders," Frist said on CNN's "Late Edition." "Everything else we've done has failed. . . . And so we need to bring in, I believe, the National Guard."

Frist said the full Senate planned to begin debating the immigration bill today and that it would take up to two weeks to pass.

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