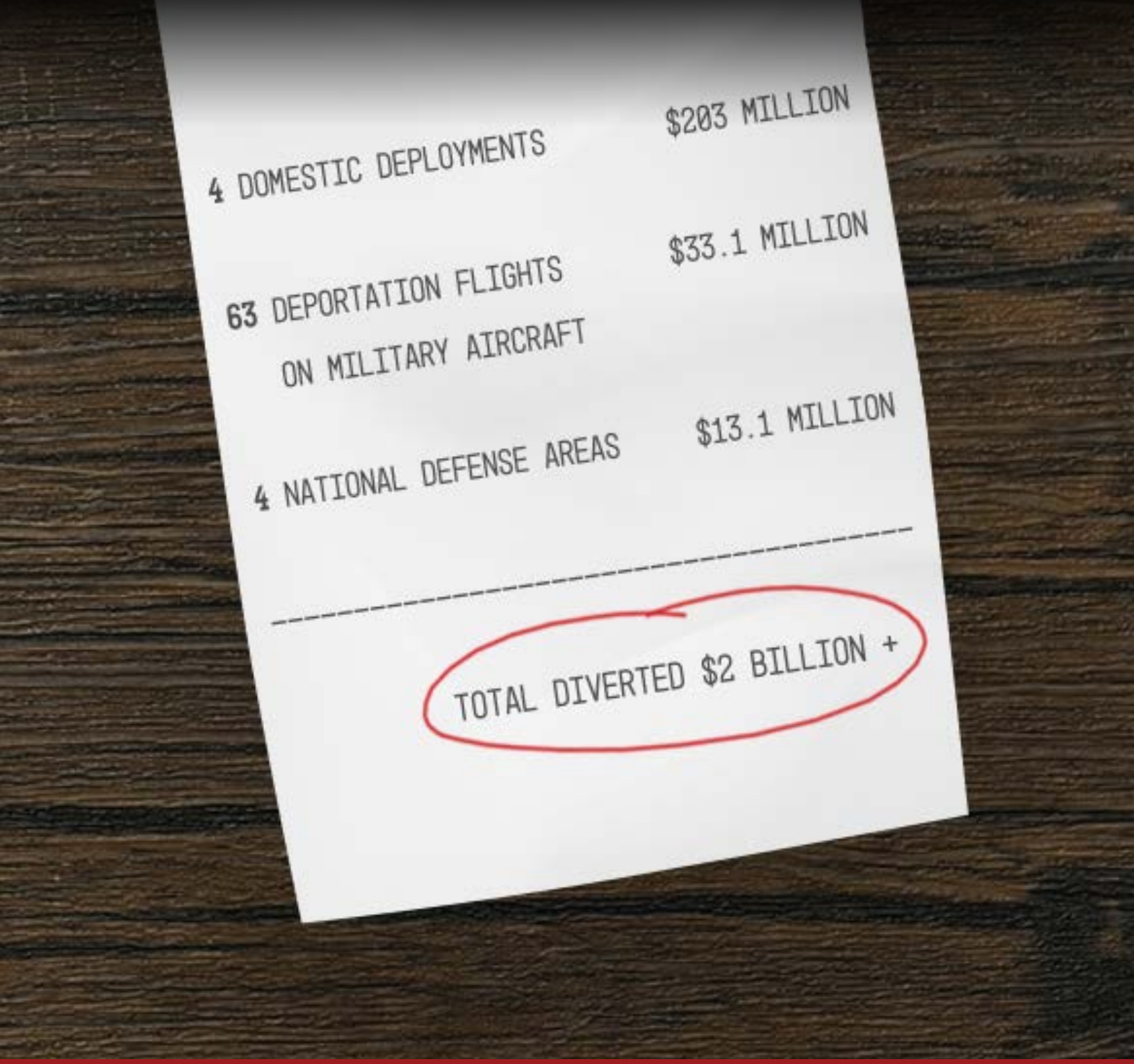

DRAINING DEFENSE

Trump's Immigration Stunts Cost Billions at the Expense of Military Readiness, Morale, and National Security

Prepared by Senator Elizabeth Warren, Representative John Garamendi, Senator Cory Booker, Senator Tammy Duckworth, Senator Mazie Hirono, Representative Chrissy Houlahan, Representative Sara Jacobs, Senator Jeff Merkley, Senator Alex Padilla, Senator Brian Schatz, Senator Adam Schiff, Senator Chris Van Hollen, and Senator Ron Wyden

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DIVERSION OF DoD FUNDS TO SUPPORT DHS AND IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT IN 2025

ACTIVITY	OBLIGATED DOD FUNDS
Deployments to the Border	$1.3 billion
Border Security	$1.1 billion
National Defense Areas	$13.1 million
Permanent Border Barrier	$187.2 million
Deployments to the U.S. Interior	$258 million
Deployment in Los Angeles	$172 million
Deployment in Illinois	$12 million
Deployment in Oregon	$16 million
Deployment in Memphis	$3 million
JAGs authorized for reassignment as immigration judges	$55 million
Detention Operations	$420.9 million
Guantánamo	$55 million
Domestic Military Installations	$365.6 million
Djibouti	$0.3 million
Flights on Military Aircraft	$40.3 million
Detainee Transport Flights to Guantánamo	$5.6 million
Deportation Flights	$33.1 million
DoD-Contracted Flights "to support migrant operations"	$1.6 million
TOTAL DIVERTED	**OVER $2 BILLION**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

President Trump's mismanagement of the military and his unauthorized diversion of congressionally appropriated funds have damaged national security and hurt the nation's servicemembers. The Department of Defense (DoD) has dedicated at least $2 billion to supporting immigration enforcement — money that should have gone toward supporting its core national security mission. The exact cost of these operations remains unclear, including the actual cost of mobilizing and deploying National Guard troops to American cities, the total cost of deporting and transporting noncitizen detainees on military aircrafts, the cost of detaining individuals on U.S. military installations, and more. What is clear is that the public can expect DoD to spend *billions* more on immigration enforcement in the near future.

Information obtained for this report confirms that the vast majority of these funds have not been reimbursed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), to date. As a result of these unauthorized expenditures, DoD is diverting funds from important military needs, including training programs, barracks repairs, and even repairs for elementary schools attended by the children of our servicemembers. The diversion of DoD resources is adversely impacting military readiness and servicemembers' quality of life, while simultaneously diminishing the National Guard's capacity to respond to disasters and other emergencies in their home states.

Key Findings:

- DoD has obligated over $2 billion to support immigration operations in 2025, with at least $1 billion of those funds already spent — and has indicated that it plans to spend billions more on immigration enforcement in the next fiscal year. DoD requested $5 billion in its Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget for the border mission.
- Military readiness will suffer as a direct result of diverting DoD funds and resources to immigration functions. For example, the Army's only air assault division is currently assigned to support DHS at the border instead of standing ready to deploy for contingency operations. Furthermore, DoD has cancelled multiple military construction projects, including construction for a jet training facility at Columbus Air Force Base in Mississippi, and reprogrammed the appropriated funds to build a permanent barrier wall along the border.
    - It is unclear how — and even whether — DoD is assessing the readiness impacts of diverting these funds and other resources.
    - The Pentagon has still not fully implemented any of the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) recommendations from 2021 for improving DoD's analysis of the readiness impacts of border operations.

- The Trump administration's secrecy leaves many questions unanswered. The administration has failed to provide clarity on basic questions about DoD's role in supporting DHS, including:
    - How many troops are currently supporting immigration enforcement functions, including: deployments to American cities and the southern border; transportation of detained immigrants; transportation of equipment; detention operations on military installations; and in-community and immigration raids and enforcement field operations?
    - How long will military units be deployed in support of DHS, and does the Trump administration intend to permanently reorient the military toward domestic immigration enforcement?
    - How much of DoD's spending on immigration- and border-related operations is reimbursable, and to date, how much has DHS reimbursed DoD?

The Trump administration must stop degrading the military's fundamental mission by diverting the military's budget and critical resources to DHS's immigration functions. DoD must stop dedicating combat troops and funding to do a job that is the responsibility of DHS. Additionally, the administration must ensure that DHS reimburses DoD for the military funds already spent and obligated in support of DHS immigration operations.

THE COSTS OF INVOLVING THE NATION'S MILITARY IN IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

During his first administration, President Trump was reportedly "obsessed with having the military involved" in the immigration system.[1] Civilian leaders at the Pentagon resisted Trump's most aggressive desires to expand the military's involvement in immigration operations, citing "the lack of budget or legal authority."[2] Now with fewer constraints, President Trump has issued executive orders claiming that immigration is a "national emergency"[3] and ordering that "our military take a more direct role in securing our southern border."[4] The current Trump administration is now routinely involving the military in an aggressive enforcement of immigration laws.[5]

When the military is tasked with immigration enforcement — a role that is not consistent with DoD's mission, and that servicemembers have neither signed up nor been trained for[6] — those operations often cost several times more than when the same function is performed by civilian authorities. For example, on January 24, 2025, both civilian and military deportation flights transported noncitizens from El Paso to Guatemala City.[7] While the civilian aircraft, chartered by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), carried 105 deportees and cost an estimated $55,000,[8] the military aircraft cost an estimated $166,000 — roughly *three times* more — to transport just 80 deportees.[9]

In addition to wasting taxpayer dollars, diverting DoD funding to immigration enforcement has meant shortchanging military priorities. For example, one notification to Congress from May 2025 indicated that funds allocated to military construction projects — including a jet training facility in Mississippi and overseas barracks for our troops — were "reprogrammed" to construct approximately 20 miles of border wall.[10]

Diverting military resources to immigration enforcement not only imposes a financial strain on the military but also carries significant intangible costs. Such diversions have been found to undermine the military's readiness to respond to emergencies.[11] For example, leading into peak fire season, the California National Guard firefighting unit was "understaffed because roughly half its members [were] deployed to Los Angeles."[12] In 2019, the commandant of the Marine Corps warned that diverting military resources to DHS caused an "unacceptable risk" for military readiness.[13]

The diversion also risks harming the military's relationship to the American public. Servicemembers and their families were "distressed" and "troubled" in June when the National Guard was activated for an unplanned and highly politicized deployment to Los Angeles.[14] Since then, the President has suggested that the military should use American cities as "training grounds" for operations against foreign enemies and invited the military to view disfavored American civilians as the "enemy within."[15]

Moreover, by largely shielding the details of the military's immigration operations from public view, the Trump administration risks eroding public accountability and transparency, and undermining its national security mission.

This report is the first compilation of the known costs of involving the military in immigration operations. Specifically, it details how DoD funds diverted to immigration have been spent to date, the implications for DoD's budget, and the adverse effects on the readiness and morale of our servicemembers and on military-civilian relations.

DOD EXPENDITURES ON IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

Since January 20, 2025, the Trump administration has diverted over $2 billion appropriated to the military to border operations and other DHS immigration enforcement functions.[16] In less than a year, the current administration has already spent more than the first Trump administration spent over three years supporting DHS.[17] DoD's budget request indicates that the Pentagon plans to spend at least $5 billion more for southern border operations alone.[18]

Under Secretary Pete Hegseth, DoD has enmeshed itself in immigration enforcement by: (1) domestically deploying National Guard and active duty troops to the southern border, ICE facilities, and the streets of American cities; (2) transferring hundreds of miles of federal land along the southern border to DoD control and designating that land as "military installations;" (3) permitting the detention of noncitizens on military installations within the United States and overseas; (4) conducting deportation flights and detainee transfers on military aircraft; and (5) authorizing the reassignment of attorneys from the Judge Advocate General's Corps ("JAGs") to serve as immigration judges.

Information obtained for this report confirms that the vast majority of these DoD funds have not been reimbursed to date[19] — even though DHS recently received an unprecedented influx of $170 billion,[20] giving ICE a budget bigger than any other law enforcement agency in the United States and bigger than many countries' militaries.[21] DoD requested $5 *billion* to support DHS efforts at the border in its FY2026 budget request.[22] Meanwhile, DoD is being forced to divert funds from important military expenses, like training programs, barracks repairs, and even repairs for elementary schools attended by the children of our servicemembers.[23] In short, the military's involvement in immigration enforcement has imposed significant costs on DoD. These costs — including the opportunity costs of missed training, degraded readiness, and diversion from missions that only the military can perform — will only compound over time.

A. Domestic Deployment of Military Troops

In the past, some military resources have been used to support border security,[24] but this administration has dramatically increased the number of troops at the southern border while also deploying troops to the interior of the United States to assist with immigration enforcement. Immediately after President Trump's inauguration in January 2025, the administration ordered additional troops to the southern border.[25] By June 2025, the military had begun deploying the National Guard and active duty forces on the streets of American cities — an operation that continues to expand across the country.[26] In July 2025, the Trump administration also authorized the National Guard, Naval Reserves, and Marine Corps to deploy in 20 states to assist with "alien processing" at ICE facilities.[27] A DHS memo detailed a request for 20,000 National Guard troops to assist with locating, detaining, interviewing, and transporting noncitizens.[28]

These deployments are costly for taxpayers. In addition to the operational costs associated with training, equipping, and transporting troops, it costs more than $8 million in salaries and benefits merely to employ the average military company with four platoons and 150 troops for six months.[29] Although the total number of deployed troops remains unknown, official military sources have

reportedly estimated that 35,000 federal troops have been deployed in Arizona, California, Florida, New Mexico, and Texas under Title 10 as of September 2025, "in service of the Trump administration's anti-immigrant agenda."[30]

1. Deployment at the U.S.-Mexico border

As of July 2025, there were roughly 8,500 troops deployed to the southern border, with additional combat units in the process of relieving the troops who were deployed to the border earlier in the year.[31]

This deployment has meant making combat-certified units no longer available for their normal functions because they are assisting DHS with immigration enforcement — raising serious concerns about the implications for military readiness. For example, the 10th Mountain Division was recently trained and certified "to conduct large scale combat operations . . . against a peer adversary in a multi-domain operational environment."[32] Yet in February and March 2025, 500 active duty soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division joined 1,600 active duty troops already deployed to the border,[33] and the 10th Mountain Division "assumed control of the southern border mission."[34] Then in September 2025, the Army announced that the storied 101st Airborne Division — the U.S. Army's only air assault division — would replace the 10th Mountain Division at the border.[35] So instead of standing ready for true national security missions, deployment-ready units are being sent to Texas and other states "to control the U.S. southern border in support of CBP."[36]

Many of these troops at the border may be doing little more than "standing around."[37] Yet their presence has not been cheap: earlier this year, DoD's own data showed it was spending an estimated $5.3 million *per day* on its border operations.[38] From January to May 2025, the border deployment cost the military over $500 million.[39] During fiscal year 2025, DoD spent nearly $900 million and obligated over $1 *billion* to the southern border mission.[40] This funding is being diverted from other DoD priorities including barracks, maintenance hangers, and military construction projects in the Pacific.[41]

DoD has also set aside $13.1 million[42] for "National Defense Areas" (NDAs): strips of land stretching hundreds of miles along the border where troops are "prepared to immediately conduct security operations."[43] The NDAs are technically considered military "installations," allowing DoD to detain individuals who enter the land and charge them with trespass; as of May 2025, hundreds of immigrants had already been charged with trespass, subject to up to 12 months in jail.[44] DoD has been attempting to post no-entry signs around vast stretches of desert to delineate these military zones,[45] adding additional costs to the deployment.

Overall, the Pentagon estimates that southern border operations could cost up to $2 billion in military spending in the first year of operations alone.[46]

2. Domestic Deployment of National Guard and Civilian Employees

The first military deployment to a U.S. city in 2025 was in Los Angeles "to protect [ICE] in the execution of their duties," according to Secretary Hegseth during a congressional hearing.[47] That operation cost DoD an estimated $172 million — including the costs of travel, housing, and meals for 700 Marines and 4,000 National Guard troops.[48] The California National Guard supplied itemized figures after DoD was unresponsive to a public records request: "$71 million for food and shelter,

$37 million in payroll, more than $4 million in logistics and supplies, $3.5 million in travel, and $1.5 million for demobilization."[49] Approximately 1,200 members of the Marine Corps and Naval Reserve were deployed under Title 10 to provide "clerical support" to ICE at immigration detention facilities in multiple states,[50] and were later replaced by National Guard troops.[51]

President Trump mobilized 200 members of the Oregon National Guard under Title 10 and was attempting to deploy those troops to Portland.[52] After a federal court blocked the deployment of the Oregon National Guard, he attempted to deploy 300 members of the California National Guard and up to 400 members of the Texas National Guard to Portland.[53] However, the federal court then blocked the deployment of any National Guard troops to Portland.[54] Nevertheless, DoD has reportedly spent nearly $16 million mobilizing National Guard troops in support of the Trump administration's efforts to send the military into Portland.[55]

In October 2025, President Trump deployed 500 National Guard troops from Illinois and Texas to Chicago to "protect U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other U.S. government personnel"[56] at an estimated cost of $265,000 per day.[57] Recent reports estimate that DoD has spent almost $13 million on the Chicago deployment.[58] Additionally, the Trump administration has spent over $3 million deploying National Guard troops to Memphis as part of a joint military-civilian "Task Force" tasked with "enforc[ing] Federal immigration law," among other things.[59] And President Trump has threatened to deploy troops to additional U.S. cities and direct them to participate in immigration functions.[60] In November, U.S. Northern Command announced a decrease in the number of troops in Chicago and Portland, but also confirmed a "constant, enduring, and long-term presence in each city."[61]

As the number of mobilizations grows, so will the financial costs of paying, transporting, housing, feeding, and equipping troops — as well as the mounting personal costs to the individuals who serve in their state National Guards, and to their families. These servicemembers are being pulled from their homes, families, and civilian jobs for indefinite periods of time to support legally questionable political stunts.

Beyond deploying uniformed personnel, the Trump administration is also requesting that DoD civilian employees volunteer to deploy in support of ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP).[62] On August 20, DoD reportedly sent an email to its nearly 1 million civilian workers offering volunteer opportunities "to contribute to [DHS] operations along the Southern border and its internal immigration enforcement activities."[63] In a memo on June 1, Secretary Hegseth authorized detailing DoD civilian employees to DHS, stating that the assignments "may be either reimbursable or non-reimbursable" by DHS.[64] The full impact of this diversion on military readiness remains to be seen.

B. Detention Operations on Military Installations

In its Fiscal Year 2025 Year End Report to Congress, DoD reported that it obligated more than $420 million toward immigration detention operations on military installations in support of DHS.[65]

1. Detention on DoD Installations within the United States

Historically, the use of military facilities within the United States to house noncitizens has been extremely limited. One of the most infamous exceptions and shameful periods in U.S. history was the Japanese Internment of the 1940s.[66] Since then, military installations within the United States have rarely, if ever, been used to detain noncitizens except as a temporary shelter in emergency situations.[67]

However, in August 2025, the Trump administration began detaining noncitizens on Fort Bliss, an Army post in Texas.[68] As of September 30, DoD had spent over $363.1 million for "the Fort Bliss Montana Avenue facility in El Paso, Texas," along with a CBP processing center.[69] The Fort Bliss facility opened with a capacity of 1,000 beds,[70] but there were plans to expand its capacity to 5,000 by 2027, at a cost of up to $1.2 *billion* to DoD.[71] This "unfinished" facility has already "violated at least 60 federal standards for immigrant detention," according to ICE's detention oversight unit.[72]

The Trump administration has said that Fort Bliss could serve as a model for military installations nationwide.[73] So far, Secretary Hegseth has approved immigration detention operations at Camp Atterbury in Indiana and Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey, and is reportedly considering detaining people at the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station in New York, the Hill Air Force Base in Utah, and the Homestead Air Reserve Base in Florida.[74]

2. Detention at Guantánamo

For decades, U.S. Naval Station Guantánamo Bay — best known for holding individuals detained for alleged links to terrorism — has been used to hold noncitizens intercepted at sea by the Coast Guard.[75] However, Guantánamo was never previously used to detain deportees from the United States.[76] Nonetheless, in January 2025, the Trump administration began deportations to Guantánamo and set a goal of detaining 30,000 individuals on the base — which would require a presence of roughly 9,000 troops.[77] In April 2025, DoD and DHS entered a memorandum of understanding (MOU) outlining the terms for ICE to use Guantánamo for immigration detention.[78] To date, President Trump has detained less than 700 immigrants at Guantánamo, though as of mid-November 2025, zero detainees remain there.[79] Nonetheless, DoD estimated it spent $40 million detaining noncitizens at Guantánamo in just the first month.[80] Setting up tents — which have gone unused — alone cost about $3 million.[81] By an order of magnitude, detention at Guantánamo is costlier than detention within the United States, given the costs of transporting supplies to Cuba, travel costs and other expenses associated with stationing DoD personnel at Guantánamo, the costs of managing environmental conditions and aging infrastructure, and more. As a point of reference, the cost of detaining individuals accused of terrorism at Guantánamo is $16,540 per day *per detainee*.[82] Meanwhile, the average daily cost to detain noncitizens in mainland ICE facilities in FY2024 was around $157.[83]

3. Detention at Other Overseas DoD Bases

Lastly, the Trump administration has used at least one other overseas U.S. military facility to detain deported immigrants. From late May 2025 until early July 2025, the military detained eight men on a U.S. Naval base in Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti in East Africa.[84] The men were bound for South Sudan and were rerouted mid-flight to Djibouti when a judge ordered that the third-country removal to South Sudan violated an existing injunction.[85] DoD reported that it spent $307,000 to detain the men for over a month at the Djibouti base.[86]

C. Military Aircrafts Conducting Deportation Flights and Detainee Transfers

Before this administration, military aircraft appear to have never been used for deportations.[87] Now, DoD has conducted deportation flights and detainee transfers for ICE using C-17 and C-130 aircraft, which are significantly more expensive to operate than civilian aircraft.[88] For example, "[i]t costs $28,500 an hour to fly a C-17, compared with $8,500 an hour for a standard U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement flight."[89] According to U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), the military command that oversees transportation operations, as of April 8, 2025, USTRANSCOM had "flown a total of 46 flights on military aircraft in support of migrant deportation flights."[90] At an average cost of $26,277 per flight hour, those 46 flights totaled an estimated $21 million — in just over 11 weeks[91] — not including the additional costs associated with aircraft maintenance.[92] Meanwhile, some long deportation flights have far exceeded the average cost and reached millions of dollars; "[t]hree military flights to India cost $3 million each."[93]

As of the end of September 2025, the Trump administration had used military aircraft to conduct at least 88 deportation stops along 63 flight routes.[94] Assuming an estimated average of 10-hour flight times each way, at an average cost of $26,277 per flight hour,[95] the Trump administration has spent at least $33.1 million of DoD funds to deport noncitizens on these military flights.

Military aircraft were also used to transport noncitizens from the United States to Guantánamo.[96] DoD has conducted at least 24 transport flights to Guantánamo on military aircraft, and the first military flight transferring noncitizen detainees to Guantánamo cost $222,136 round trip.[97] As of September 9, transporting noncitizens to Guantánamo for detention cost the military $5.6 million.[98] Despite the steep price tag, some of these military flights have transported only "a handful of migrants."[99] For example, that first C-17 flight to Guantánamo carried 10 migrants — translating to $22,213 per migrant.[100]

Additionally, there are operational costs of transporting extra troops and cargo to Guantánamo for detention operations; for example, between January 20, 2025 and March 25, 2025, the Pentagon paid private airlines over $1.6 million to transport military passengers and cargo to Guantánamo "to support migrant operations."[101]

Beyond the substantial costs associated with using military aircraft for deportations and transfers to Guantánamo, these operations carry serious readiness consequences. Using military aircraft for deportations takes them away from their essential function of moving troops and equipment to support national security missions. The Trump administration is undermining these missions by effectively using military aircraft as prison transports for DHS.

D. Military Attorneys ("JAGs") as Immigration Judges

In July 2025, President Trump approved the deployment of JAG officers from the Florida National Guard to serve as temporary immigration judges at "Alligator Alcatraz."[102] Then, in September 2025, Secretary Hegseth authorized approximately 600 JAG officers to be reassigned to the Department of Justice (DoJ) to work as immigration judges.[103] These military attorneys will apparently receive less training than standard immigration judges[104] despite the complexity of immigration law, before serving 179-day assignments to adjudicate high-stakes immigration cases for people facing deportation.[105]

This reassignment will not only be expensive but will take up to 600 JAG attorneys away from their statutory mission administering military justice — and from their core duties working with servicemembers as prosecutors, defense counsel, military judges, preliminary hearing officers, and

command advisors within the military justice system.[106] JAG officers also provide legal services to servicemembers preparing for deployment, including drafting wills, powers of attorney, medical directives, and more.[107] Lastly, JAGs are being taken away from their usual role of deploying with their assigned units — including with military units deploying to the border and U.S. cities — to serve as commanders' legal advisors.[108]

Considering only the pay and benefits of those officers for 179 days, the cost of the authorized reassignment could reach an estimated $55 million.[109] On October 23, 2025, the Office of Legal Counsel issued an opinion advising that DoJ should reimburse DoD for JAGs detailed as temporary immigration judges.[110] It is unclear whether DoJ has begun reimbursing DoD for JAGs who have already been detailed.[111]

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY MISSIONS, READINESS, AND SERVICEMEMBERS

The reallocation of DoD funds to support immigration enforcement has not only been financially costly but has degraded the readiness and wellbeing of our troops — undermining servicemembers' interests and the military's mission.

A. Cuts to Military Housing and Other Servicemember Support

Diverting over $2 billion to immigration operations means the military has less to spend on its current priorities — such as investing in military family housing, repairing crumbling military barracks, and other underfunded projects that would improve servicemembers' quality of life. For example, this year, DoD redirected $1 *billion* of funding for barracks renovations to border operations.[112] Additionally, in May 2025, DoD notified Congress of its intent to reprogram $200 million of military funding in order to construct approximately 20 miles of border wall along the border at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma and to remove the existing barrier.[113] Secretary Hegseth diverted the $200 million from several projects, including: (1) elementary schools at Fort Knox and the military installation in Stuttgart, Germany; (2) an ambulatory care center and dental clinic to service Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington; (3) a jet-training facility in Mississippi; and (4) Marine barracks in Japan.[114] In August 2025, the House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services was notified that another $100 million of military construction funding would be diverted to southern border operations.[115]

Not only will these diversions of funds cause delays of military construction projects, but they mean taxpayers will ultimately pay more for those projects. The first Trump administration employed a similar tactic of funding the border wall by diverting DoD funds from 127 military construction projects, such as military dining facilities and a childcare center for military families.[116] For example, Congress authorized and appropriated $18.5 million for FY2018 for DoD to build a new dining facility at Camp Bullis.[117] But with funds diverted for the border wall, that project was delayed until Congress reauthorized the project in the FY2023 NDAA.[118] However, the project cost increased by over 80 percent due to changed circumstances during the delay, including an increase in construction costs and reduced availability of materials and equipment in the San Antonio area, so taxpayers ended up paying $15 million *more* than expected, after DoD was forced to request additional funding.[119] In total, the diversion of DoD funds by the first Trump administration cost taxpayers an additional $512 million in increased construction costs.[120]

B. Threats to Military Readiness

Between April 2018 and August 2020, the first Trump administration deployed a total of over 8,000 troops to the southern border.[121] The Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the deployment reduced servicemembers' readiness; for example, training exercises were canceled, units were separated, and pilots had trouble completing their training requirements when Blackhawk helicopters were sent to the border.[122]

The current deployment — at an even larger scale than under the first Trump administration — may require units to miss key exercises necessary to ensure combat readiness, such as combat training center rotations and warfighter exercises. It could also preemptively employ units that are on call to respond to real-world emergencies. In practice, supporting immigration enforcement detracts call-ready units from responding to contingency operations.[123] Similarly, units that are deployed in support of DHS are unavailable for humanitarian rescue missions, such as responding to wildfires, hurricanes, and flooding events.[124] In the long term, these types of diversions place additional strain on equipment, servicemembers, and military families.

Several military units and installations have experienced the practical implications of diverting military resources to immigration enforcement. For example, aircraft from Travis Air Force Base (AFB) have been redirected to support deportation flights, diverting them from their core mission.[125] Travis AFB is a linchpin in U.S. power projection and logistical operations across the Indo-Pacific, enabling the rapid movement of personnel, materiel, and equipment to forward-deployed locations.[126] These diversions disrupt scheduled training sorties and compress maintenance cycles, eroding aircraft readiness and introducing unnecessary risks to the base's ability to respond to regional contingencies.

Travis AFB faced additional threats to its readiness when DoD proposed deploying a significant portion of its medical staff to Guantánamo Bay in support of DHS detention operations.[127] The Travis Medical Center is not only a critical treatment center for casualties originating from the Pacific theater but also plays a critical role in providing care to nearly half a million people in the DoD and Veterans Affairs (VA) health care systems in California.[128] The loss of medical personnel would have severely diminished healthcare capacity at the Travis base, further degrading operational readiness.

And even Republicans have acknowledged ways in which DoD's involvement in immigration operations can degrade military readiness. When military installations prepared to hold unaccompanied children in 2014, Republican members blasted the use of military resources, and one noted: "The request to extend use of [DoD] facilities for housing [noncitizens] is a very real threat to U.S. military readiness."[129]

It is unclear whether and how the military is assessing these impacts on readiness. After the 2018-2020 border deployment, GAO recommended that the Pentagon "improve its analysis and reporting of cost and unit-level readiness impacts of supporting southwest border operations."[130] However, DoD has not yet fully implemented any of those recommendations.[131]

C. Impacts of Diverted Resources on Servicemembers

During the first Trump administration, the Secretary of Defense, "with input from the Joint Staff," stopped deploying active duty personnel to the border after determining "that personnel were not performing military functions and that continued support for the mission would negatively affect military readiness and morale."[132] Relatedly, an *Army Times* investigation found "[a]lcohol and drug abuse became so widespread that senior leaders issued breathalyzers."[133] The mental health damage caused by this mission appeared to have even contributed to a number of tragic suicides among Texas National Guardsmen.[134]

Now, servicemembers are suffering from similar frustrations, including due to the lack of clarity around how long the deployments will last.[135] According to one task force commander along the border in California, "[i]t is up in the air in that we don't have a defined redeployment date at this time."[136] Meanwhile, DoD continues sending additional military units to the border and U.S. cities as an escalation of force.[137] In August 2025, President Trump demonstrated an apparent lack of consideration for how to conclude these domestic deployments when he "said he can keep the National Guard in the nation's capital 'as long as I want' if he declares a national emergency."[138] The uncertainty surrounding the duration of these deployments is felt particularly hard by the National Guard and Reserve units whose members are forced to set aside their civilian jobs and disrupt their family lives to support DHS.

On top of these concerns, questions about the legality and politics of using the military to support immigration enforcement damage servicemembers' morale and risk harming the military's reputation with the American public. One National Guard member told a reporter, "I plan to leave the National Guard soon over this."[139] Another report indicated that internal military documents "underscore how domestic mobilizations [of the National Guard] that are rooted in politics risk damaging Americans' confidence in the men and women who serve their communities in times of crisis."[140] Those internal documents described "a sense of 'shame' among some troops and veterans."[141]

CONCLUSION

Diverting the military from its existing missions and thrusting it into immigration enforcement does not make Americans safer. This multi-billion-dollar political stunt is an overt waste of taxpayer resources and undermines national security, military readiness, and resources for our servicemembers. Notably, the goal of entangling the military in civil immigration enforcement appears to be, at least in part, to signal toughness and intimidate immigrant communities.[142] Furthermore, forcing the military to participate in a divisive agenda may have long-term impacts on the military's non-politicized nature and its credibility with the American public — impacts that could linger long after this administration. Not to mention, there appear to be serious questions "about the legality of using [military troops] for immigration enforcement."[143]

DoD has diverted more than $2 billion from the military in support of DHS missions in a matter of just 9 months and plans on spending billions more.[144] To prevent further damage to military readiness and our troops, the Trump administration should minimize the military's involvement in immigration enforcement and ensure that DHS reimburses DoD for any funds already diverted from the military to immigration enforcement.

ENDNOTES

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