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NEWS

Texas National Guard orders hundreds of asylum-seekers on US territory back into Mexico



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JUÁREZ, Mexico — Members of the Texas National Guard on Tuesday ordered hundreds of asylum-seekers from U.S. territory back into Mexico in apparent violation of U.S. law.

Hundreds of migrants breached reams of concertina wire at the El Paso-Juárez border over the past two days, forming a line along the south side of the U.S. border fence inside U.S. territory to seek asylum or formal entry into the U.S.

Just after midday, National Guard soldiers could be seen ordering migrants to return to Mexico through the Rio Grande.

“That is 100% illegal,” said Adam Isacson, director of defense oversight for the Washington Office on Latin America. “These are people who may face a danger to their lives on the other side of the border. Forcing them back, especially if they have set foot on U.S. soil goes against the Refugee Act of 1980.”

The Texas Military Department didn't immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

Migrants reported they spent two days waiting in line at the border near the towering red X sculpture in Juárez, on the U.S. side, some without water or food. The U.S.-Mexico borderline lies in the middle of the canal; the gravel utility road just south of the border fence is U.S. territory.

The Biden administration implemented several “legal pathways” earlier this year for migrants, including Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans — an attempt to reduce irregular immigration that was successful for the first three months. But both the

humanitarian parole and CBP One appointment programs are oversubscribed, and some migrants said they couldn't keep waiting.

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Pushed back into Mexico, dozens walked farther east along the concrete river canal to attempt crossing again.

Helen, a 25-year-old Venezuelan woman, was among them.

“They were forcing us back and yelling,” she said, asking that her full name be withheld as she intended to line up at another spot along the border fence in hopes of seeking asylum. “There were some who didn't want to leave and still they were screaming that we had to get out.”

National Guard Humvees and SUVs belonging to the Texas Department of Public Safety were lined up along the border fence; U.S. Border Patrol wasn't at the site.

As migrants milled about on the Mexican side, soldiers could be seen unrolling more concertina wire, laying the silver coils in the river.

This is a developing story.