

**Testimony of Retired Major General Randy Manner
before the Senate Judiciary Committee
“How Mass Deportations Will Separate American Families, Harm our Armed Forces, and
Devastate Our Economy”
December 10, 2024**

Introduction

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, Members of the Committee, I thank you for your invitation to speak today on the unintended negative impacts on our military if they are used in any mass deportation operation.

For over 35 years, I served our nation in both the regular Army and in the National Guard as both a part time citizen soldier and a full-time Title 10 officer after being mobilized in September, 2001. Prior to retiring from the Army as a Major General, I served as the Deputy Commanding General of the United States 3rd Army in Kuwait, as the Acting Vice Chief of the National Guard Bureau, and as the Acting and Deputy Director of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. Throughout my career, I was very honored to lead both active duty and National Guard organizations and have seen the best that our nation had to offer from our active duty and reserve component Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines. To clarify, the opinions I am sharing with you today are my own, and I am not representing or speaking on behalf of any part of the Department of Defense or any other organization.

During the three and a half decades that I served, as well as since I retired from active duty, I have never been prouder of our military. It is a force that is both respected by allied military forces and people around the world who desire to live in peace and without oppression, and also feared by our enemies and those who might want to do us harm. I want to thank each of you, as U.S. Senators, both in this room and those who have served in the Senate in the past, for supporting our military and veterans with your votes for the budgets for the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs. Without Congressional support, we would not have such a highly trained, equipped, manned, and respected force to deter war and prepare for combat.

Our military members come from all 54 states and territories and the District of Columbia. They come from rural areas, small and large towns, and cities. They come from conservative, moderate, and liberal families and have a variety of educational experiences and backgrounds. They represent every ethnic group, religion, and sexual orientation. They reflect America. Before joining up, few of them have traveled extensively outside of their communities; in many cases, they have had little interaction with Americans who are different from those they grew up with. When these Americans come together in the military, they are molded into a coherent team that is expected to demonstrate and live by the values which make America great: duty, honor, integrity, respect, selfless service, loyalty, personal courage, and excellence.

Military members learn that it doesn't matter what your politics are, where you come from, the color or your skin, or your religion. What matters is that they can count on you to do your job when all hell breaks loose, so everyone gets to come home together.

Today, this respected institution and the values it embodies face a serious threat. President-elect Donald Trump has announced his intent to utilize the U.S. military in his mass deportation plan. This would fundamentally shift the role of the military from national defense to include domestic law enforcement, raising serious legal, operational, and ethical concerns. Traditionally, immigration enforcement has been handled by the civilian federal law enforcement agencies of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The military, on the other hand, is tasked with defending the nation against external threats, not policing domestic civilian populations. Placing our military at the center of these efforts could cause significant harm to both the institution of our armed forces and to servicemembers themselves.

As this committee examines the impact of using the military as part of the mass deportation operation, there are four concerns I want to raise:

1. The impact on military readiness;
2. The risks of utilizing the military for a law enforcement or immigration enforcement mission for which they have virtually no training or experience;
3. The negative impact on servicemembers' morale and on recruitment and retention; and
4. The significant impact this could have on reducing the public's trust in our men and women who serve in uniform, as well as on their families and on veterans.

Military involvement in mass deportation efforts would undermine readiness by pulling resources away from critical defense priorities

Utilizing military assets in mass deportations would detract from the military's core mission of national defense. Our military is already engaged in over 160 countries around the world. As part of its role in the reserve component, National Guard units regularly deploy overseas in active-duty status working alongside regular U.S. and partner nation units. At home, they are conducting homeland defense missions, responding to hurricanes, flooding, and forest fires, and training to be ready for all contingencies. National Guard personnel maintain civilian careers and lives and patriotically devote on average 39 days per year to creatively train on military skills.

National Guard units are already spread thin and have virtually no time for additional missions or training. While National Guard units continue to assist CBP at the border, as former Chief of the National Guard Bureau General Daniel Hokanson has stated, these deployments serve no military value and detract from the National Guard's core mission.

Through both law and regulation, regular and reserve military forces have a more restrictive definition of their mission compared to the National Guard. The mission of the Department of Defense is simple: provide combat-credible military forces needed to deter war and protect the security of our nation. Additional training or deployments to support deportation operations in lieu of devoting the time, money, and effort needed to prepare for combat would absolutely harm operational readiness and reduce the military's ability to counter adversaries or respond to crises. Our active duty military needs to continue to prioritize responding to potential threats from near-peer competitors like China and Russia, strengthening interoperability with allies and partners, and taking care of our servicemembers and their families.

Members of the military are not trained in civilian law enforcement because it is not a military function

Immigration enforcement is the responsibility of federal law enforcement agencies like ICE and CBP. These agencies are specifically trained on the applicable federal and state laws and work alongside state and local law enforcement pursuant to statutorily authorized agreements. ICE and CBP personnel also regularly interact with migrants and U.S. citizens. They are trained in the protection of civil rights and civil liberties, the appropriate application of immigration law, and care of migrants in custody.

The military is designed to defend against external threats, not police its own citizens. This separation is foundational. The Posse Comitatus Act specifically limits the military's role in domestic law enforcement for this very reason, to keep military operations separate from civilian policing. The U.S. military is the best trained in the world for its warfighting mission, but is neither trained nor equipped for immigration enforcement or detention.

It is important to understand that ICE and CBP officers receive extensive training on how to deal effectively and safely with civilians in the United States and in contrast our military members receive zero. This is a critical reflection of the fact that immigration operations are not a U.S. military mission as directed by the Commander of USNORTHCOM.

While a very small number of National Guard units do conduct four to eight hours of civil disturbance training annually, the vast majority of National Guard and virtually all active duty units are not trained for situations where they may be engaged in domestic law enforcement activities. Decades ago, particularly after the tragedy at Kent State in Ohio and during the domestically turbulent and divisive 1960s and early 1970s, Civil Disturbance Training for Guard units was much more common. The number of Guard units who participate in this training has significantly declined over the decades due to the growing professionalism and capabilities of state and local police forces, and the difficult realization that a mere 8 hours of Civil Disturbance Training was completely inadequate for most Guardsmen to accomplish that mission successfully and safely.

The shift from a warfighting mission to law enforcement, immigration enforcement, or detention mission increases the risk of significant and potentially deadly mistakes in a charged operational environment.

Military involvement in mass deportation efforts would harm recruitment and retention

The military is already facing its most challenging recruitment environment in 50 years. Domestic involvement of the military in politically-charged deportation efforts will only add to those challenges. These controversial actions would be highly visible, would separate families, and would create instability in communities throughout the United States as doctors, teachers, and storekeepers were pulled away for additional National Guard deployments for long periods of time.

Mass deportation efforts of this scale also sends a message to non-U.S. citizen servicemembers with lawful status. Immigrants have served in the U.S. military since the founding of our country. Since 2002, [187,000 service members have been naturalized](#). As the Deputy Commanding General of the U.S. Third Army, I have personally administered the oath of U.S. citizenship to dozens of military members in a combat zone. I shared their tears of pride as they could say for the first time, “I am an American . . .” About 5,000 permanent residents enlist each year. It is not just a question of morale; military readiness and effectiveness also depend on the well-being and resilience of these service members, as well as servicemembers’ families — approximately 26% of military spouses are foreign born. Above all, mass deportation will have profound impacts on mixed-status families, where some members are undocumented while others are citizens or legal residents.

When the public sees the military as a domestic political tool, it harms morale, unit cohesion, and effectiveness. Negative public perception of the military deters potential recruits. Highly politicized domestic actions will exacerbate the ongoing quality-of-life challenges for military families and harm retention efforts. Keeping skilled service members preserves institutional knowledge and expertise, which is crucial for successful military operations.

Just a few weeks ago, I spoke to a young person who, after years of eagerness to serve in the military, was having second thoughts. He expressed grave concerns over what the military (and he) may be asked to do in the next few years in America, specifically citing the reports that the military may be part of domestic law enforcement operations. He is greatly concerned with how the military would be politicized and perceived by a deeply divided nation. Sadly, I know these feelings are increasingly common among both potential recruits and current servicemembers. We owe it to our fellow Americans to keep the military out of controversial domestic law enforcement activities such as a mass deportation operation.

Military involvement in mass deportation efforts would undermine public trust in the armed forces and our veterans.

The U.S. military is one of our country's finest institutions. Public trust in the military, however, has increased and declined in response to societal shifts. Involvement in the military in politically-charged issues like mass deportations would create ethical concerns and risks, harming this trust. After a natural disaster, most people welcome National Guard units in their communities to help save lives and distribute badly needed food and water. In contrast, when many people see the Guard involved with immigration enforcement and detention of their neighbors, these National Guard members may be placed in an impossible, politically-fraught position, eroding domestic civil-military relations. These divisions and perceptions may follow these National Guard personnel returning to civilian life. Unfortunately, negative public perceptions of the military can affect how veterans are perceived and treated, as well. And, as noted above, this widening of the military-civilian divide increasingly impacts the ability to effectively recruit and sustain the force, which has direct consequences for our national security.

Conclusion

Any deployment or operation comes with risks that must be evaluated. The armed forces exist to defend the country, not to police its citizens or to enforce controversial and politically-charged immigration policies. Putting the military in the center of deportation efforts, where they have little to no training, would heighten the risks to our servicemembers and to our military readiness. It also would undermine civil-military relations and the long-term health of the military. These risks and unintended consequences are too high and I urge any future presidential administration to keep immigration enforcement and our military separate.