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Obama administration switches border security strategy before election year

Posted on December 20, 2011 | By Stewart Powell

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The Obama administration is cutting the 1,200 National Guard troops along the southwest border for the past 18 months to just 300 troops.

It's part of a Pentagon shift from boots on the ground to "air mobility support" for armed US Border Patrol agents.

The Pentagon and the Department of Homeland Security announced the change in course today.

The transition begins in January from two-man National Guard surveillance teams backing up Border Patrol agents on the ground to airborne surveillance and helicopter-borne movements of federal law enforcement to cover a wider area with fewer personnel.

"The deployment of these new DOD technical assets, along with the additional DHS personnel on the ground, will enable DOD to reduce the number of National Guard troops at the southwest border while enhancing border security," the administration said in a statement.

The air support will be in place by March 1, the administration said. The Pentagon plans to spend \$60 million for aerial support along the border — funds that will provide for Oh-58 Kiowa helicopters and UH-72 Lakota helicopters, as well as other fixed wing aircraft.

The switch from National Guard surveillance teams to airborne surveillance and helicopter movements of law enforcement personnel will raise the profile of border security operations and "reduce enforcement response time," administration officials said a statement.

The shift stems from budget pressures and dramatic drops in the number of people trying to cross the border illegally.

U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions dropped from 1.6 million in 2000 to 340,252 last year — an 80 percent drop over 11 years.

The ranks of the U.S. Border Patrol have doubled since 2004 to 21,444 agents with more than 18,000 of those agents stationed on the southwest border from Texas to California.



National Guard to end ground-based border surveillance

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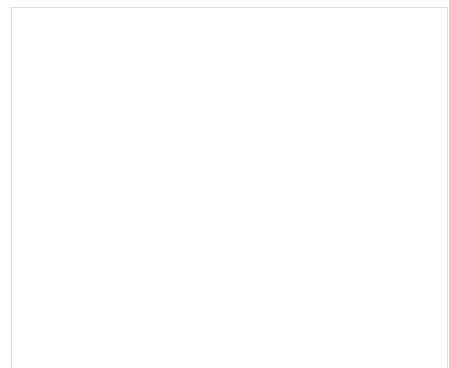
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