

Pentagon deploys troops along Mexico border

WASHINGTON

THE Pentagon said it has begun deploying 1,500 active duty troops to help secure the southern border...

Acting Defence Secretary Robert Salesses said the troops will fly helicopters to assist Border Patrol agents...

The number of troops and their mission may soon change, Salesses said in a statement. "This is just the beginning," he said.

"In short order, the department will develop and execute additional missions in cooperation with DHS, federal agencies, and state partners to address the full range of threats outlined by the President at our nation's borders," Salesses said.

Officials said there was no plan now for the troops to do law enforcement, which would put them in a dramatically different role for the first time in decades.

The active duty forces will join the roughly 2,500 US National Guard and Reserve forces already there. Until this deployment, there were no active duty troops working along the roughly 2,000-mile border.

A couple hundred troops started moving to the border earlier Wednesday, according to a senior military official. The troops will include 500 Marines from Camp Pendleton in California, and the remainder will be Army.



Construction crew replace sections of one of the two border walls separating Mexico from the United States in Tijuana, Mexico | AP



New fire erupts near LA, triggers evacuation

Blaze fanned by strong, dry Santa Ana winds racing through the area; evacuation ordered for 31,000 people

CASTAIC

AN explosive new wildfire erupted north of Los Angeles on Wednesday, forcing tens of thousands of people to evacuate their homes...

The fire was fanned by strong, dry Santa Ana winds racing through the area, pushing a vast pall of smoke and embers ahead of the firefront.

Evacuations were ordered for 31,000 people around the lake, which sits 56 kms north of Los Angeles, and close to the city of Santa Clarita.

"I'm just praying that our house doesn't burn down," one man told broadcaster KTLA as he packed his car.

The Hughes Fire came as the greater Los Angeles area was on edge after two enormous fires tore through America's second largest metropolis, killing more than two dozen people and wreaking billions of dollars of devastation.

As California faces a massive rebuild, President Donald Trump repeated his false claim that the state was improperly diverting water away from the site of the emergency, threatening to withhold federal funds as a result.

"I don't think we should give California anything until they let water flow down into their system" from



Plumes of smoke from the Hughes Fire rise in Castaic, California. (Top) Firefighters spray water as part of control measures on Thursday | AP

the north of the state, Trump said in an interview on Fox News aired on Wednesday evening.

Los Angeles's water supplies are mainly fed via aqueducts and canals originating from entirely separate river basins further east.

Around 4,000 firefighting personnel, backed up by aircraft and bulldozers, surged to the new blaze, a massive response that Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marone said was paying dividends.

"The situation remains dynamic, and the fire remains a difficult fire to contain, although we are getting the upper hand," he said.

The hopeful tone came after a nervous day for the region, where

many people remained glued to television coverage of the aerial firefight - scenes that became common during lengthy battles to contain the Eaton and Palisades Fires.

Helicopters dropped water and planes dumped tens of thousands of fire retardant, laying down lines of red intended to corral the flames and pinch the firefront.

The fleet included two Super Scoopers - enormous amphibious planes that can carry hundreds of gallons (liters) of water - as well as DC-10 jets and dual rotor helicopters. Crews from the Los Angeles County Fire Department and Angeles National Forest also attacked the blaze from the ground. AFP

Two Palestinians killed for carrying out Jan 6 attack on bus in West Bank

JERUSALEM

ISRAELI forces have killed two Palestinian militants who carried out a deadly attack on a bus in the West Bank earlier this month.

The Israeli military said Thursday that the two men barricaded themselves in a structure in the West Bank village of Burqin and exchanged fire with Israeli troops before they were killed overnight.

The army said a soldier was moderately wounded.

The military said Mohammed Nazzal and Katiba al-Shalabi were operatives with the Islamic Jihad militant group.

The Hamas militant group released a statement claiming the two men were members of its armed wing and praising the bus attack. Hamas and the smaller and more radical Islamic Jihad are allies that sometimes carry out attacks together.

The Jan 6 attack on the bus carrying Israelis killed three people and wounded six others. Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Middle East war.

The Palestinians want it to form the main part of their future state.

In another attack in Gaza, the Israeli military said its soldiers killed an alleged militant in Gaza whom it said posed a threat to its forces, as the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas stretched into a fourth day.

Meanwhile, Israeli forces are pressing ahead with a major military operation in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin for a second day. At least 10 people have been killed, Palestinian health officials say.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar said that Israel would not compromise on its objectives of dismantling Hamas' military and governing capabilities, and that there were no guarantees for the success of the three-phase cease fire in the war in the Gaza Strip.

Speaking alongside in Budapest, Sa'ar said Hamas leaders had declared their intent to carry out more attacks on Israel similar to on Oct 7. AP

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Spanish film Emilia P' rez leads with 13 nominations at Oscar

WASHINGTON

In the wake of devastating wildfires in Los Angeles that struck at the heart of the movie industry, an embattled Hollywood lined up behind the Netflix narco-musical about trans identity 'Emilia P' rez' in Oscar nominations Thursday.

Jacques Audiard's 'Emilia P' rez,' a Spanish language, French-made film, dominated the nominations with a leading 13 nominations, including best picture and

best actress for Karla Sof' a Gasc'n, making her the first openly trans actor ever nominated for an Oscar. The film also landed nominations for directing, original screenplay, two of its songs and for Zoe Saldana. Netflix, despite its starring role in Hollywood, has never won best picture. Many of its top contenders have previously racked up large numbers of nominations (including 'Mank,' 'The Irishman' and 'Roma') but gone home with only a handful of trophies. AP

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