



## CIVILIAN MILITIA PATROL U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

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*A group of self-appointed civilian border patrol agents have begun a month-long effort along the U.S.-Mexico border to stem the flow of illegal immigration into the United States, frustrating federal authorities who say they will hamper not help the problem.*

The Internet-based group calling itself the Minuteman Project began patrolling a 23-mile stretch of the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona April 3. Volunteers, some armed with guns or knives, are watching for illegal migrants and then reporting them to the U.S. Border Patrol. According to the groups organizers, over 200 volunteers have arrived already.

The Minutemen say they don't plan to use their guns. "We can ask them if they'll wait," volunteer Penny Magnotto told the Washington Post, "but we can't touch them."

The group takes its name from the Minutemen of the American Revolutionary War -- armed civilians who pledged to fight against the British. But this group claims its aims are peaceful and that its real purpose is to draw attention on the border patrol issue in the United States.

"This thing was a dog and pony show designed to bring in the media and get the message out and it worked," Jim Gilchrist, project founder, told the LA Times.

The group has the support of some residents of Riverside, CA, on the border with Arizona, who rallied outside an Arizona patrol station chanting, "close the border now."

"What we hope this will accomplish is that our message will get back to (President) Bush that the American public wants our immigration laws enforced and our borders secured," Arne Chandler of Temecula told the San Diego North County Times.

### **The Arizona Border**

The 370-mile Arizona border is one of the most frequently crossed between the United States and Mexico. Of the 1.1 million illegal immigrants captured by the U.S. Border Patrol last year, 52 percent crossed at the Arizona border.

U.S. officials fear that the porous border could allow in al-Qaida terrorists.

"Several al-Qaida leaders believe operatives can pay their way into the country through Mexico, and also believe illegal entry is more advantageous than legal entry for operational security reasons," Homeland Security Department Deputy Secretary James Loy said last week.

## Critics

Critics, including President George Bush who referred to the Minutemen as “vigilantes” during a press conference last month, fear that the untrained volunteers create a dangerous situation.

“The Border Patrol does this every day, and they are qualified and very well-trained to handle the situation. Ordinary Americans are not,” said Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Robert Bonner. “There’s a danger that not just illegal migrants might get hurt, but that American citizens might get hurt in this situation.”

The Border Patrol said volunteers were setting off sensors along the border and blurring footprints that agents follow.

“They’re tromping all over the place making our job a little more difficult,” Tucson-based Border Patrol spokesman Andy Adame told The Washington Post. “It’s not a major crisis, but it is detrimental to operations.”

Some local residents disagree with the project also.

“I want this border issue solved, but I don’t want these guys out here, acting up and playing Wyatt Earp,” Bisbee, Ariz. resident Mike Anderson told the Republic Tucson Bureau as he held a sign that read: “Minutemen: Angry White Men With Nothing Better To Do.”

## Is the plan working?

Minutemen organizers say the project has been a success so far and that fewer migrants are attempting the journey.

“No one’s crossing and that was the goal, to show the government that if we have people out here no one’s going to cross,” said Chris Simcox, Minuteman field operations director.

The Border Patrol reports apprehending about 100 immigrants a day since the patrols began, far fewer than the usual 300. But U.S. officials say the reason is increased activity by Mexican police on the Mexican side of the border.

But for many migrants, the possibility of finding work or reuniting with family in the United States is still a big draw.

"I don't care about the Minutemen. I'm afraid of the coyotes," a teenager from the Mexican state of Jalisco told the Boston Globe, referring to the smugglers who carry undocumented migrants north. "I'm going anyway."

-- *Compiled by Annie Schleicher, Online NewsHour Extra*

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