

Obama Administration Forms Military “Strike Team” to Respond to Ebola Cases in the U.S.

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The Obama Administration has ordered the Department of Defense to form a 30-member military medical “quick strike team” that can deploy quickly — within 72 hours — to any new outbreaks of Ebola in the U.S., reports have said.

The team will consist of five physicians, 20 nurses and five trainees, according to reports, and will be tasked with providing “direct treatment to Ebola patients inside the United States,” according to CNN.

“The concept is said to have come out of Obama’s recent White House meeting, one in which reports had him berating staff for an inadequate response to the growing crisis around Ebola,” *Breitbart News* reported.

CNN said Pentagon officials have confirmed the formation of the team, which will be able to quickly deploy any time over the next month.

The team was requested by the Department of Health and Human Services. CNN reported further that the Defense Department “has been working to determine what assistance it could offer the civilian health care sector” after a recent White House meeting in which the president made it clear that he wanted a more aggressive response to any new Ebola cases.

‘No violation of Posse Comitatus’

Following the meeting, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel ordered Gen. Chuck Jacoby, head of U.S. Northern Command, or USNORTHCOM, which oversees homeland defense and security, “to prepare and train a 30-person expeditionary medical support team that could, if required, provide short-notice assistance to civilian medical professionals in the United States,” said Pentagon press secretary Rear Adm. John Kirby.

The Pentagon spokesman added that Jacoby, a four-star Army general, has begun work on the joint team. Once it is formed, Kirby continued, the team will be sent to the Army’s medical training facilities at Fort Sam Houston, near Austin, Texas, to begin seven days of intense training in infection control and the wear of personal protective equipment.

The U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases will provide the training, Kirby said. Once trained, the team will remain in a “prepare to deploy” status for one month and be able to respond anywhere in the U.S. if “deemed prudent by our public health officials,” he added.

Some have questioned whether the military's medical response team has the authority, under law and the Constitution, to operate within the boundaries of the U.S. Some have argued that the regular [military](#) is prohibited from responding inside the country by the Posse Comitatus law, passed in the 1870s during the Reconstruction Era; the law specifically prohibits the military from any action to "execute the law."

But Kirby, in an MSNBC interview with *Morning Joe* host Joe Scarborough, a former GOP congressman, said that the military did have "the legal authorities" to form the team, and that its domestic operation would not violate the 1870s-era law.

Regular military vs. National Guard

"This is nothing more than potential support, and I stress 'potential support,' to civilian medical authorities — if and only if they ask for that," Kirby said. "But there's no violation of posse comitatus. The Northern Command commander has the authorities that he needs to get this team ready to go."

USNORTHCOM was created in 2002, during the Bush Administration following the 9/11 attacks. The Army command's primary function is defense of the homeland, in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which was also a post-9/11 creation.

CNSNews.com reported that the "nature" of the assistance to be provided by the [Ebola](#) team was "not explained." The news site went on to report that "concern about additional Ebola cases suggests the military would be used to enforce potential quarantines."

But most likely, any substantial military assistance, via USNORTHCOM and DHS, would first come via the mobilization of National Guard units, which are commanded by state governors but which can also be called up on the President's order into federal service.

Today's Guard is a descendant of the country's first "militia" units and are not regular military, which is why governors can call them up to assist state agencies and local police during times of emergency.

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