

Texas guard isn't on high alert, officials say

Plans in place if violence spills over border, Perry's office says.

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A story making the rounds online Thursday had the Texas National Guard on high alert because of the escalating drug-cartel violence just across the border in Mexico.

Not exactly, Gov. Rick Perry's office said.

"There's no heightened alert status," said Katherine Cesinger, Perry's deputy press secretary.

On Feb. 17, she said, the Guard was placed on heightened status when the state's emergency operations center was placed on active status during protests at international bridges, just in case any official response or support was needed in Texas.

Since then, Cesinger said, the state has developed contingency plans for addressing any cartel violence that might spill across the border, but those plans do not involve anyone being on alert status at present.

The source of the e-fuss: Comments to several talk shows by state Sen. Dan Patrick, R-Houston, who is also a conservative broadcaster.

Patrick said Thursday that his comments — first made to Fox News, then to several radio talk shows — had been blown out of proportion on the Internet.

"What I said was what I have been told ... what was testified about in (Capitol) hearings, what I have been saying for some time, that anyone who does not think this is a very serious issue has not been paying attention," Patrick said in a phone interview.

"Texas is actively monitoring this situation, as it should be."

Referencing the protests at international bridges, Patrick told Fox News last week that the state was on alert "for the first time, to my knowledge, in modern history," out of concern that violence could spill over the border.

He said parts of Mexico are on the verge of civil war and he likened the cartel-fueled violence in some parts of northern Mexico to a similar crisis in Colombia in the 1990s.

In fact, state officials said, they've been on alert many times for a variety of reasons — hurricanes

included.

Texas Homeland Security director Steve McCraw told legislative committees in recent days that state officials are closely monitoring the increasing violence in Mexican border areas, and have contingency plans to address any spillover of the cartel violence into Texas.

State Sen. Eliot Shapleigh, D-El Paso, said in a brief speech on the Senate floor on Wednesday that the mayor of Ciudad Juarez — a major Mexican city just across the border from El Paso — has had to flee to El Paso with his family because of threats on his life.

In a Feb. 20 alert, the U.S. State Department warned travelers to Mexico about the increasing violence between feuding cartels, and cartels and Mexican security forces.

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