

Donald Trump's visit to Mexico border marred by demonstrators protesting his plans for 'big, beautiful border wall'

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Donald Trump's motorcade, on Tuesday, zipped past demonstrators who both jeered and cheered him and his plans for a "big, beautiful border wall" after he inspected prototypes.

A Trump supporter (far right) and an anti-Trump supporter (left), confront each other on Tuesday. AP

San Diego: President Donald Trump's motorcade, on Tuesday, zipped past demonstrators who both jeered and cheered him and his plans for a "big, beautiful border wall" after he inspected prototypes.

The president's first visit to the California border amid a contentious battle with state officials over his immigration policies was peaceful. Hundreds of people participated in scattered rallies on both sides of the border dividing San Diego from Tijuana, Mexico.

Law enforcement was out in force, and the area where Trump visited the eight prototypes was heavily cordoned off.

Rows of police kept apart supporters and opponents of the Trump administration along the avenue where his motorcade drove down. Each side booed, cheered and waved both Mexican and American flags as the president's convoy sped past them. Among the crowd, a man wearing a "Make America Great Again" cap debated policies with a woman holding a "No human is illegal" sign.

About 10 miles (16 kilometers) west of the prototypes, protesters chanted, "No ban! No wall!" at the nation's busiest border crossing, San Ysidro. Tens of thousands of people enter the US daily from Tijuana, Mexico, many on their way to work or school in San Diego. Drivers honked as a show of support.

Jose Gonzalez, 21, stopped to snap a photo of the protesters holding signs, including one that read: "Wall off Putin!" "I don't think it's really fair how he has the choice to separate us," said Gonzalez, a dual citizen who lives in Tijuana and crosses daily to work at a San Diego ramen restaurant.

Army veteran Mark Prieto, 48, shook his head as he walked by the protest. "People are so narrow-minded," said the firefighter, who voted for Trump. "Finally we have someone who is putting America first."

Trump examined eight 30-foot-tall (9-meter-tall) prototypes built last year along the border in a bid to fulfill his signature campaign promise.

U.S. authorities moved semi-trailers between the prototypes and the Mexican border, offering a layer of protection. A man, woman and two children were seen climbing the border fence at the site on Monday and were immediately detained.

Trump spoke with immigration enforcement officials and with Marines at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar before heading to a fundraiser in Beverly Hills, where a crowd of demonstrators for and against the president faced off in a park. A group of pro-immigration protesters chanted "Say it now, say it clear, immigrants are welcome here."

San Diego's mayor criticised Trump's short visit, saying the president won't get a full picture of the city. Kevin Faulconer said that if Trump had stayed more than a few hours, he would see that a strong economy and free trade aren't a contradiction but a way of life.

The mayor, a business-friendly Republican and ardent supporter of the North American Free Trade Agreement, said a popular cross-border airport terminal connecting San Diego and Tijuana shows that "building bridges has worked wonders." The terminal is a few miles from the border-wall prototypes.

Trump had campaigned against NAFTA as a job killer that he said encouraged American companies to move factories to Mexico to exploit cheap labor. Renegotiations over the deal began last summer.

Faulconer, writing in The San Diego Union-Tribune, also said San Diego police work to protect everyone regardless of immigration status, an apparent dig at Trump's push to target illegal immigration.

The issue has led to heightened tensions between California and the Trump administration. The Justice Department recently sued over state laws that limit cooperation with immigration authorities, which state officials have harshly criticised.

San Diego's City Council last year passed a resolution opposing Trump's proposed wall.

- AP