A controversial project begins along Arizona's border with Mexico as American volunteers called "Minutemen" patrol for illegal immigrants and smugglers. Critics accuse the Minutemen of being anti-immigrant extremists.

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Transcript

Minutemen Patrol the Border with Mexico

ANN CURRY, anchor:

A controversial project gets under way today along Arizona's border with Mexico. Volunteers are on patrol looking for illegal immigrants and smugglers. NBC's Mark Mullen has more from Naco, Arizona this morning.

Mark, good morning.

MARK MULLEN reporting:

Ann, good morning to you. Well, today is the first day the so-called Minutemen will be out in force along the US/Mexico border in Arizona.

They were busy, though, over the weekend, claiming credit for the arrest of 18 illegal immigrants over this weekend.

Unidentified Man #1: You better put your state flags up.

MULLEN: About 400 volunteers this month are expected to join the so-called Minutemen, citizens frustrated with what they claim is a failure to protect and control US borders.

Unidentified Woman: It's not a matter of just Mexicans crossing the border. Pretty much anybody who can get into Mexico can get into the United States.

MULLEN: Minutemen volunteers will fan out in groups about 100 yards from each other and across 23 miles of Arizona's San Pedro Valley, a favored crossing point by illegal immigrants and smugglers.

Unidentified Man #2: Everybody listen! You guys want to go out to the border, I know, right? You're anxious.

MULLEN: Although the Minutemen say they will simply observe and report illegal immigrants, some human rights organizations and residents fear the Minutemen, some of whom will be armed, could lead to vigilante violence.

Mr. JOSE GARZA (Arizona Border Patrol): We'd rather that they leave the job of patrolling our borders...
to the--in the hands of the border patrol agents.

MULLEN: This month may be the busiest yet for Arizona border agents, keeping a close watch on the Minutemen as well as the border.

Some of the harsher critics actually accuse the Minutemen of being anti-immigrant extremists, but the Minutemen campaign comes amid concerns the terrorists might slip into the United States through these southern borders. Ann:

CURRY: NBC's Mark Mullen this morning. Mark, thank you.