

Mitigating the Exploitation of U.S. Borders by Jihadists and Criminal Organizations

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Abstract

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Government began improving security in large population centers and near potential highvalue terrorist targets. Included in these efforts was the development of a more robust border security program, with an emphasis on reducing the threat of terrorist infiltration at America's borders. However, nearly a decade after 9/11, terrorism and organized crime continue to pose significant threats to the United States. As many of these threats emanate from other nations, improved border security helps mitigate these threats. This article summarizes known terrorist activity along the U.S. northern and southern borders, and highlights the threat of organized crime in the southwest border region. Furthermore, it analyzes current border security efforts and identifies key deficiencies in the system. Finally, it provides a tool kit for future border security endeavors that center on developing a larger but more coordinated and nimble border security force, driven by intelligence, and supported by proven technologies and tactical infrastructure.

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Abstract

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Government began improving security in large population centers and near potential high-value terrorist targets. Included in these efforts was the development of a more robust border security program, with an emphasis on reducing the threat of terrorist infiltration at America's borders. However, nearly a decade after 9/11, terrorism and organized crime continue to pose significant threats to the United States. As many of these threats emanate from other nations, improved border security helps mitigate these threats. This article summarizes known terrorist activity along the U.S. northern and southern borders, and highlights the threat of organized crime in the southwest border region. Furthermore, it analyzes current border security efforts and identifies key deficiencies in the system. Finally, it provides a tool kit for future border security endeavors that center on developing a larger but more coordinated and nimble border security force, driven by intelligence, and supported by proven technologies and tactical infrastructure.

Introduction

Few topics in American public discourse are as controversial as border security and illegal immigration. Presently, notions of "traditional" illegal immigration dominate the debate. News agencies and advocacy groups focus primarily on the movement of workers from Mexico or Central/South America into the United States. However, mixed within this element are sophisticated intercontinental criminal networks comprised of drug cartels, human smugglers, and gangs that stretch from America's southern border to Central and South America to Africa and Europe. Not only are these networks responsible for the raging drug war in Mexico, but they also pose a significant threat to U.S. citizens and law enforcement living and working along the border. Additionally, their connections with U.S.-based criminal groups directly contribute to criminal activity in America.¹

Furthermore, there is growing concern over the expansion of Islamic extremism in the Western world. Evidence suggests that there is a significant presence of anti-American Islamic groups operating in the Americas.² Every year, federal, state, and local agencies catch thousands of special interest aliens (SIA)—individuals who originate from special interest countries (SIC) identified by the U.S. Government to harbor and/or otherwise support international terrorism—fueling concerns that extremists are increasingly utilizing existing illegal networks to move operatives and materials into the United States.³ From the numerous SIA encounters and the seizures of jihadist materials along the southwest border, it appears that SIA's travel from countries overseas to Central and South America, and then attempt to infiltrate America's borders illegally. The northern border is not immune to these infiltrations, either. Beyond the threat emanating from the U.S./Mexico border, there are al-Qaida-linked cells and grassroots extremist groups operating in Canada. Several previous terrorist plots involved jihadists illegally crossing the Canadian border either to plot attacks or to recruit and fundraise.⁴

The United States has made significant strides in improving border security following 9/11. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), born out of the aftermath of these events, has over the past nine years pursued critical improvements in airport security and customs enforcement. While some security enhancements have been made, notably at the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), a component of DHS, security between border checkpoints remains insufficient; and limited resources leave the overwhelming majority of U.S. borders vulnerable.⁵ While it is impossible to completely secure America's borders, officials should pursue several key improvements. First, the homeland security workforce should be con-

tinually developed into a highly skilled and nimble force. Second, the workforce should be led by coordinated and actionable intelligence and supported by advanced tools and technologies. Finally, intelligence must be available to and leveraged by existing state and local law enforcement agencies.

Understanding the Threat at America's Borders

Security controls and policies at America's borders enable the flow of millions of people and facilitate the transactions of billions of dollars of legal commerce each year. However, intertwined with everyday legal activities exists a complex tapestry of sophisticated illegal enterprises vying to exploit America's porous borders. Along the U.S./Mexico border, drug cartels, human smugglers, kidnapping rings, thieves, and gangs contribute to an increasingly dangerous environment for citizens and law enforcement of both countries. Deteriorating border security environments, created in part by the brutal drug war raging in Mexico to the south and the lax security posture along the U.S./Canadian border to the north, provide openings for international terrorist groups and criminal enterprises to fundraise, recruit, and plan attacks.⁶ As a result, terrorists who have operated in Canada, such as Ghazi Ibrahim, Abu Mezer, Lafi Khalil, Ahmed Ressam, and the "Toronto 18" exemplify the shared security risk for both Canada and the United States.

The Growing Threat of Organized Crime along the Southwest Border

The single greatest driving force affecting the security environment along the U.S./Mexico border is organized crime, and, more specifically, Mexico's violent drug war. Operating throughout the U.S./Mexico border region is a web of sophisticated illegal organizations that leverage well-established networks to move goods and people across America's borders. These groups include drug cartels, human smugglers, gun smugglers, kidnapers, gangs, and thieves.

The drug cartels are by far the most sophisticated, utilizing advanced military weaponry, state of the art technology, and paramilitary tactics.⁷ These cartels and their enforcers wield substantial power and control key routes into the United States, as well as vast territories in Mexico. For years the cartels have used bribes and intimidation to corrupt thousands of government officials and exert authority. According to Mexico's Public Safety Secretary, Genaro Garcia Luna, in 2010 drug cartels paid around \$100 million dollars a month in bribes to municipal police officers across

Mexico to ensure that their activities went undisturbed.⁸ The corruption reached epidemic levels. While the government maintained control over much of Mexico City, eventually the outlying regions in Mexico effectively fell under the control of the cartels.

The drug war problem started in 2006 when more than 2,000 people died in Mexico at the hands of the drug cartels.⁹ In response, the Mexican military and federal police launched an offensive to weaken their organizations, bring drug-related violence down, and root out government corruption. However, the drug war progressed and the death toll escalated as the cartels turned to more extreme measures to protect their turf and their shipments. As Mexican authorities weakened one organization, others rushed in to fill the vacuum. Soon two wars were being fought: one between rival cartels over highly lucrative drug turf and another between the cartels and the government.¹⁰ By 2008, the number of homicides more than doubled; and in 2010, Mexico experienced more than 11,000 drug-related homicides.¹¹ In total, more than 28,000 crime-related deaths have occurred in Mexico since the beginning of the drug war in 2006.¹² Included among the dead are more than 915 municipal police officers, 698 state police, and 463 federal agents.¹³

As the drug war continues, the cartels have increasingly turned to more devastating weapons, such as high-powered assault rifles, fragmentation grenades, incendiary grenades, Molotov cocktails, and improvised explosive devices in attacks on government officials. Once an isolated threat, violence is now present in most regions of Mexico, with the vast majority occurring in areas along the U.S./Mexico border in states like Baja, Chihuahua, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas. For example, in Ciudad Juarez, located just across the border from El Paso, Texas, more than 6,500 people have died since the beginning of 2008.¹⁴ At 191 homicides per 100,000, Ciudad Juarez ranks as the most violent place in the western hemisphere.¹⁵

The violence is not restricted to Mexico. Murders and kidnappings on the U.S. side of the border have increased significantly over the past few years.¹⁶ Because of the increased pressure placed on the cartels by both Mexican and U.S. security officials, the cartels have escalated their tactics, and U.S. law enforcement increasingly experiences violent encounters with cartel members. Today, smugglers do not hesitate to confront law enforcement and often fire upon them with automatic weapons and engage in high-speed pursuits.¹⁷ Between October 2009 and March 2010, for example, 134 CBP agents were assaulted, a 45 percent increase over the 93 assaults CBP reported during the same period the prior year.¹⁸

The cartels are incredibly adept at moving their shipments of drugs, utilizing a number of methods to transport their cargo and evade detection. The cartel's solutions range from basic to highly sophisticated. Tunnels running from safe houses on both sides of the border are common. Between 2006 and 2010, law enforcement personnel uncovered 75 different tunnels running underneath the U.S. border.¹⁹ In addition, drug smugglers have used ultra-light aircraft to carry illegal narcotics into the United States. Between September of 2009 and May of 2010, the CBP Air and Marine Operation Command (AMOC) identified more than 135 suspected incursions using ultra-light aircraft.²⁰ The cartels have also begun to use highly sophisticated semi-submersible boats to move large quantities of drugs. Other less sophisticated methods include traversing the desert on ATVs and motorcycles, cutting or destroying fences, floating narcotics across rivers, concealing drugs in vehicles or inside people's bodies, using dead drops in concealed areas, and bribing border officials to get through checkpoints.²¹

Impact of Mexican Organized Crime inside the United States

According to many law enforcement officials, there is growing interconnectivity between Mexican drug cartels, human smuggling networks, and American gangs.²² While Mexican drug cartels are responsible for smuggling illicit goods across the border, gangs and criminal organizations often are distributors of the drugs throughout the United States.²³ Large international street gangs like Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the Mexican Mafia maintain a presence on both sides of the border and engage in smuggling as well as distribution.²⁴ In fact, U.S. law enforcement in at least 28 states has reported catching MS-13 members engaged in drug distribution since record-keeping of such incidents began.²⁵ In addition, motorcycle gangs like the Bandidos and Mongols maintain chapters throughout the southwestern U.S. and use allied groups to spread their narcotics northward.²⁶ Even prison gangs and hundreds of localized street gangs distribute illicit goods in places throughout the country.

In 2005, the U.S. Department of Justice estimated that approximately 30,000 gangs operated in the United States.²⁷ While many of these gangs are not formally or directly linked to the drug cartels, their symbiotic relationship with them provides greater resources and capabilities that threaten law-abiding citizens and law enforcement officers. The gangs use the revenue provided by the distribution of narcotics to buy weapons and fund other criminal enterprises, such as kidnapping, racketeering, and property crime.²⁸ Furthermore, the illicit markets fuel turf wars between

Journal of Strategic Security

rival groups over lucrative drug territory. These battles often place the lives of innocent bystanders and place law enforcement officers in jeopardy.

The Growing Threat of Terrorism

In addition to the threat posed by organized crime along the southwest border, the threat of terrorist infiltration remains a critical concern at both the northern and southern borders. Each year, U.S. law enforcement agencies catch thousands of SIAs from SICs with known ties to terrorism attempting to cross the border.²⁹ Many of these SIAs are smuggled into Central and South America and then illegally brought across America's southwest border. Meanwhile, the presence of Islamic extremists in Canada highlights the threat of terrorism along America's northern border as well.³⁰

Border Data to Track the Terrorist Threat

It is difficult to accurately quantify the true threat terrorists pose to American borders. Today, the primary statistic used by border security experts to evaluate the threat posed by terrorism is the number of Other than Mexicans (OTM) and SIAs encountered along the border. However, basing terrorist threat assessments on the number of OTMs and SIAs detained along the border is misleading. Not all SIAs are terrorists, and some individuals originating from non-special-interest countries could also pose a threat. It is unclear how many illegal aliens avoid capture, and therefore, just as difficult to define the number of SIAs entering the country each year.

Terrorism at the Southwest Border

History demonstrates that terrorists search for security gaps and invent creative ways to exploit them. In fact, terrorists rely on security weaknesses to operate effectively. International terrorist groups know that criminal organizations in Central and South America maintain well-established networks that enable them to smuggle large quantities of narcotics and people across America's southern border. Terrorists could use these illicit criminal networks to smuggle weapons, chemicals, biological contaminants, and/or explosives into the United States. As Zapata County, Texas Sheriff Sigifredo Gonzalez observed:

"If smugglers can bring in tons of marijuana and cocaine at one time and can smuggle twenty–thirty persons at one time, one can just imagine how easy it would be to bring in two to three terrorists or their weapons of mass destruction...chances of apprehension are very slim."³¹

Terrorists also know that large segments of both the northern and southern border remain relatively unsecured. It is a known fact that several radical international Islamic groups maintain significant operations in Central and South America and engage in money laundering, drug trafficking, arms dealing, and other legitimate and illegitimate means to funnel millions of dollars every year into the hands of transnational terrorists.³²

Border Security: Successes and Deficiencies

Current State of Border Security

Balancing the need for security along America's borders with the economic imperative of protecting the legitimate flow of trade and travel into the U.S. is a daunting challenge. CBP, as well as other state and federal agencies, has made significant strides over the past decade in improving their capabilities and leveraging minimal resources to meet these difficult challenges. Over the past four years, CBP nearly doubled the number of agents at its disposal, growing its ranks from approximately 11,000 agents in 2006 to more than 20,100 at the close of 2009.³³ These figures effectively make CBP the largest uniformed federal law enforcement agency in the country.³⁴

In 2005, CBP adopted its current strategy, which places an emphasis on interdicting terrorists. The key objectives of this strategy are to: establish a probability of apprehending terrorists as they attempt to enter between ports of entry; deter illegal entries through improved enforcement; detect, apprehend, and deter smugglers; leverage smart border technology; and reduce border crime.³⁵ Along the northern border, where the primary concerns are terrorist infiltration and smuggling, the CBP emphasizes the use of intelligence, liaison, and technology to bolster minimal levels of personnel. To maximize the northern border strategy, CBP reaches out to Canadian immigration and security agencies to improve coordination and enhance intelligence gathering through the use of various technologies, like cameras and remote sensors. The Integrated Border Enforcement Teams (IBET) focuses on sharing intelligence and coordinating opera-

tions between American and Canadian forces. Along the Southern border, where illegal immigration and organized crime remain the key focus, CBP emphasizes personnel, equipment, and tactical infrastructure.

A critical component of CBP's border security effort is the Secure Border Initiative (SBI). Devised in late 2005, SBI was intended to help front-line assets secure America's land borders with Canada and Mexico by ensuring the deployment of an integrated system that includes both tactical infrastructure and technology.³⁶ However, DHS cancelled further investment in the costly "virtual fence" and has promised to roll out a more integrated approach in future iterations.³⁷

In addition to DHS and CBP, a number of other federal agencies support the border security mission. These agencies include ICE, the FBI, the ATF, the DEA, and the Coast Guard, among others. To prevent terrorism and battle criminal organizations, CBP joined with ICE's Anti-Smuggling Units to focus its intelligence and surveillance on known smuggling operations that traffic aliens from special interest nations, and developed joint operations to target high interest smuggling activities.³⁸

Critical Deficiencies in the System

While CBP has made significant improvements to the nation's border security program over the past decade, significant deficiencies still exist. In fact, major swaths of America's northern and southern borders remain unsecured. One measure DHS uses to track their progress is the number of miles under "effective control." Effective control of an area occurs when the CBP is expected to apprehend a detected illegal border crosser.³⁹ CBP is responsible for securing approximately 8,607 miles of U.S. northern and southern borders, including coastal sectors. As of May of 2009, DHS effectively controlled only 894 miles of border, comprised of 697 miles along the southwest border, 32 along the northern border, and 165 in the coastal regions.⁴⁰ To adequately meet the primary goals outlined in its strategy to achieve and maintain effective control of U.S. borders, CBP must improve these numbers significantly.

One reason for the limited miles under effective control is the failure to implement a unified technological solution. The most recent attempt, SBInet, became the primary technological component of the SBI. Commonly referred to as "the virtual fence," SBInet is a series of networked cameras, sensors, radar systems, and communications equipment meant to detect intruders and facilitate rapid response.⁴¹ The program began in 2006, and DHS intended to incrementally adopt the concept to cover approximately 6,000 miles of America's borders with Mexico and Can-

ada.⁴² However, DHS stopped work on the program in March of 2010. It was eventually cancelled in early 2011, due to alleged missed deadlines and cost overruns resulting from technical problems and program delays, leaving an already insufficient number of agents with considerably less support than originally intended.

Recommendations

Expand the CBP Ranks

For the Border Patrol to pursue its mission adequately, the U.S. Government must provide additional funding to drastically improve the CBP's ability to recruit and train new agents. While the Border Patrol added more than 1,700 agents to its workforce in FY2009, more manpower is needed to provide even minimal security. Simply put, despite its large size relative to other U.S. law enforcement bodies, the CBP is understaffed for its mission and is therefore unable to effectively patrol the border, leaving sizable areas with little enforcement. While technology and physical barriers can enhance security, without agents to guard a fence or respond to tripped sensors, these countermeasures amount to little more than a minor inconvenience to highly motivated criminals and international terrorists. To meet its increasingly difficult demands, the CBP should set a goal to double its workforce over the next five years.

Reduce Agent Attrition Rates

In addition to recruiting and training additional agents, CBP must address its high rate of attrition. After dropping to just 4 percent in 2005, the CBP attrition rate jumped to about 10 percent in 2007.⁴³ While the most recent data is unavailable, in 2009 the rate remained at 10.1 percent.⁴⁴ In 2003, the last time the attrition rate reached beyond 10 percent, the Director of CBP noted that agent attrition was "reaching crisis proportions."⁴⁵ According to the Director, the high rates of attrition at the time resulted from lack of job satisfaction, lack of upward mobility, poor working conditions, and low pay compared to other law enforcement with similar positions. With the attrition rate reaching a similar level today, it is likely that many of these same factors persist.

Such high rates of attrition make it more difficult to expand the CBP and contribute to an overall lack of experience within the force. Put in simple terms, a 10 percent attrition rate means that CBP needs to recruit and train more than 2,000 additional agents each year just to maintain its current numbers. Furthermore, it takes time and advanced training to

Journal of Strategic Security

replace the loss of a seasoned agent with a new recruit. To remedy this situation, CBP must work to provide additional opportunities for advancement to retain career-minded individuals, provide improved working conditions wherever possible, increase CBP pay scales to the levels of other federal law enforcement agencies, and provide other incentives to promote the hiring and retention of CBP agents.

Leverage State and Local Law Enforcement

To enhance the reach and effectiveness of federal agents, the CBP must improve their coordination with local law enforcement and provide training and resources to state and local law enforcement agencies near the border. After all, even with significant increases in the CBP ranks, it is impractical for the federal government to effectively patrol thousands of miles of border alone. Furthermore, state and local law enforcement possess a unique understanding of the local area that can benefit federal operations.

Some argue that border security is solely a federal government responsibility. This view came to the forefront in July of 2010, when the U.S. Government sued the State of Arizona to block the implementation of a controversial law (SB 1070) that required police officers to check the immigration status of individuals they approached for law enforcement purposes. In *U.S. v. Arizona*, the federal government argued that, under the Constitution, immigration enforcement is solely a federal matter.⁴⁶ However, state and local officials along the border have a vested interest in border security because they are often the most affected by the issues plaguing the borderlands. Like their federal counterparts, they are responsible for the safety and security of their citizens. In many of the more remote border areas, the lack of a federal presence compels state and local law enforcement to manage most border-related criminal matters on their own.⁴⁷ When illegal immigrants cause property damage or steal vehicles to bring them across the border, or when drug cartel members assault or kill someone, citizens call the local police. Unfortunately, many of these agencies lack the necessary resources to effectively patrol the hundreds or thousands of square miles under their control; partnership with the federal government is a must.

Simply put, when the federal government is unable to properly protect the residents of a state or city from crime associated with illegal immigration, terrorism, and illegal border crossings, then that responsibility falls on the shoulders of state and local officials. In many ways, the passage of the immigration law in Arizona stemmed from a widespread perception that the federal government was not adequately addressing the concerns of

citizens living along the border. In July 2010, U.S. Representative (Arizona) Gabrielle Giffords echoed that sentiment when she said:

"I am disappointed in the federal lawsuit against SB 1070 for the same reason I was disappointed when this bill became law...the supreme irony of the lawsuit is its premise that SB 1070 intrudes on the federal government's responsibility to enforce immigration laws. Had the federal government taken that responsibility seriously in the past, neither today's lawsuit nor the state law that prompted it would be necessary."⁴⁸

Instead of creating an adversarial relationship with state and local governments, the federal government should develop a partnership with these agencies built on mutual self-interest. After all, the local agencies can provide the manpower and local knowledge that the federal government often lacks, while the federal government can provide the financial, materiel, and training support required at the local level.

Expand Anti-Corruption Efforts

As the ranks of border security personnel grow, law enforcement agencies must expand their anti-corruption efforts to keep pace. The overwhelming majority of CBP agents perform their duties with integrity and honor. Criminal organizations, however, are actively engaged in recruiting law enforcement to help avoid detection. As a result, isolated acts of corruption do occur. Between October 1, 2004 and March of 2010, 103 CBP officers were indicted or arrested on charges ranging from money laundering and smuggling to conspiracy.⁴⁹

Few things threaten security operations more than corruption. It tarnishes the image of law enforcement and severely impacts the effectiveness of security measures. To combat this threat, CBP already employs a number of anti-corruption measures, such as background checks, polygraph examinations, behavioral and analytical research tools, agent training, and misconduct investigations.⁵⁰ Despite these efforts, corruption still exists. So, while thorough screening practices and polygraph examinations remain critical elements of any anti-corruption plan, CBP must continue to enhance its ability to identify and investigate incidents of corruption. In particular, law enforcement agencies should place a greater emphasis on expanding the scope and prevalence of joint anti-corruption task forces to root out corrupt law enforcement officers.

Emphasize Acquisition of Off-the-Shelf Technologies in the Near Term

In addition to drastically increasing the number of personnel dedicated to securing the border, the government must accelerate the deployment of advanced technologies to act as a force multiplier. Presently, border security personnel employ a variety of technologies—ranging from simple, man-portable equipment like radios and night vision goggles—to vehicles and other high-tech solutions like sensors, helicopters, planes, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), non-invasive detection equipment, and video surveillance systems.

Recently, DHS began a new approach to procure proven off-the-shelf technologies to fill the void left by the failure of the SBI-net program. This approach is necessary to reduce lead times for fielding new equipment and avoid costly failures like SBI-net because policymakers must move swiftly to provide the resources that front-line assets desperately require. In dire demand is advanced surveillance equipment that can provide critical intelligence information, identify potential threats, display information across a common operating picture, evaluate the size and scope of a threat, and track various threats until agents can respond.

In January of 2011, DHS issued a request for information (RFI) regarding currently existing surveillance systems capable of operating from fixed towers located at elevated sites.⁵¹ While it is unclear whether such a system currently exists to meet DHS requirements, these proposed Integrated Fixed Towers (IFT) could provide surveillance capabilities that span an area of about 25 miles deep by about 30 miles wide. Conceivably, if DHS were to link the cameras with a video-over-IP solution to enable real-time video, then command centers could orchestrate a response from miles away. While these technical systems have the potential to improve detection and ultimately apprehension, they are stationary, and therefore, limited in their ability to track targets over long distances.

UAVs, on the other hand, are proven, more versatile than fixed surveillance, and have the added benefit of being currently available. Employed by the military all over the world, the Predator-B offers operationally proven capabilities for border security. Unlike smaller UAVs, the Predator-B can handle high winds and carry up to 850 pounds internally and 3,000 pounds of sensors and equipment externally.⁵² With a speed of up to 240 knots and an ability to remain aloft for thirty-four hours, the Predator-B can fly long endurance surveillance missions and provide real-time feeds that cut through dense fog, cloud cover, or foliage to a central control center.⁵³ More importantly, unlike IFTs, the Predator-B is a highly

mobile asset, useful for tracking threats over long distances and easily redeployable to adapt to changing operational requirements. While there are legal considerations involved with flying UAVs over American or Mexican/Canadian territory, the areas where the UAVs would provide the most impact are remote, limiting privacy concerns.

Pursue Long-Term Development of New Technologies

While fielding existing and proven technologies is critical to providing assets that border security personnel need immediately, CBP cannot entirely abandon the development of new technologies. The failure of SBInet, for example, should not deter the government from pursuing newer technologies. Future initiatives should include forward deployable man-portable UAVs, ground-based drones, biometric scanners, and other sensors.

One technology nearing the testing phase is the "Mega Blimp" platform concept, which is conceivably able to stay aloft for weeks and provide unique surveillance and tracking capabilities. If fielded, these football-field-sized Mega Blimps could offer considerable advantages over other UAV platforms. U.S. Army officials calculated that one Mega Blimp, for example, could provide the same functions as twelve advanced Reaper UAV drones.⁵⁴ Northrop Grumman's version of the Mega Blimp, the Long Endurance Multi-Intelligence Vehicle, can carry up to 2,500 pounds of data links, sensors, antennas, and signals intelligence (SIGINT) equipment. Meanwhile, Lockheed Martin's blimp, the Integrated Sensor IS Structure, can track the movement of people up to 185 miles away.⁵⁵

Continue Development of Tactical Infrastructure in Targeted Areas

Tactical infrastructure consists of various types of security structures, such as physical barriers.⁵⁶ While tactical infrastructure cannot provide effective control by itself, it does act as a deterrent and supports law enforcement operations by slowing illegal border crossers' ability to move or escape, thereby decreasing the time it takes for law enforcement to respond.⁵⁷ Therefore, it is vital that CBP continue to employ and improve physical barriers to reroute traffic to provide longer time frames for interdiction, and continue to build roads and trails to enable quicker response.

Journal of Strategic Security

Improve Information Sharing among Federal, State, and Local Law Enforcement

The federal government should provide funding and guidance to state and local authorities for the development of intelligence capabilities and use of intelligence fusion centers to improve dissemination at all levels of government. It is often said that the default setting of any organization is not to share. Politics and interagency rivalry often further erode cooperation. Developing a system of true collaboration requires hard work, dedication, and trust; however, maintaining a focus on the shared mission at hand can help overcome many of the traditional turf battle issues. Improving this coordination not only provides federal authorities with additional sources of information, but also allows for quick dissemination of federal intelligence and greater opportunities for collaboration.

One concept developed to handle this process is the intelligence fusion center. Today, approximately fifty-eight intelligence fusion centers exist in the United States.⁵⁸ Largely formed by state and local authorities in response to the attacks on 9/11, fusion centers facilitate information sharing and operational planning by combining and exchanging data and intelligence from multiple sources and "fusing" it into more comprehensive actionable intelligence.⁵⁹ In theory, these fusion centers facilitate collaboration among disparate groups, provide a more comprehensive operating picture, and streamline dissemination. Use of these facilities varies, however, and many depend on state funding to operate. This leads to concerns that state governments may eliminate their fusion centers because of budget concerns under tough economic conditions.⁶⁰

Although many fusion centers staff federal law enforcement agents, each fusion center develops its own standards, employs its own equipment, and sets its own priorities. This can create issues in coordinating between disparate centers and can slow down or even eliminate collaboration. Nevertheless, these fusion centers offer a unique opportunity for improving collaboration among federal, state, and local levels. Therefore, the federal government should provide additional funding to maintain these centers and push for standardization to improve interoperability and capability.

Develop Rapid Response Capabilities

Even with dramatic increases in personnel, it will remain impossible to man every mile of America's borders. As CBP fields advanced technologies to help surveil the border and detect and track intruders, the ability to respond quickly to threats is paramount. The federal government

should train local teams to work in coordination with border patrol assets to manage rapid response. Because of the different environments and terrain along America's borders, response times, equipment, and training needed to accomplish these tasks will depend on the location. Different teams will need access to a broad array of technology, including helicopters, speedboats, and ATVs to accomplish their mission.

Install Border Outposts in Remote High Threat Areas

Distance is a critical component of response time. In many areas, CBP posts exist miles behind geographic borders. Therefore, to limit the distance response forces must cover, CBP should create border patrol outposts in remote areas, closer to the border, to provide staging zones for operations and incident response. Manning these posts with a rotation of skilled rapid response teams would enable a quicker response and provide a primary layer of security. As law enforcement detects a threat, CBP could deploy assets from these advanced bases in coordination with assets located further behind the border. This type of security in depth limits the opportunity for evasion and increases the likelihood of interdicting threats.

Emphasize Intelligence Driven Surge Operations

The criminals and terrorists operating along the borders constantly evolve their tactics to avoid interdiction. They study the movement of law enforcement and work to find ways to exploit weaknesses in security plans. Therefore, it is critical that law enforcement continually adapts its tactics to stay ahead of the terrorists and criminals. Much like random security checks at airports, surge operations in areas where law enforcement identifies a growing threat can introduce a greater level of uncertainty in the minds of criminal planners.

Improve Coordination with Foreign Governments

Border patrol is not the first line of defense in border security, and CBP has worked over the past several years to improve coordination with foreign governments to help with shipping and security practices. Criminals and terrorists continue, however, to exploit weaker immigration controls in Central/South American nations to gain entry into the United States. It is vital the U.S. Government continue to forge security partnerships with nations in the Americas and provide guidance and support to these nations to improve their document controls, anti-corruption measures, and immigration standards.

Emphasize Linguistic Skills and Training at the Southern Border

Because of the international nature of border security, CBP must increase the available pool of agents with advanced secondary language skills. This is particularly important along the southern border, where it is believed that foreign operatives are moving to Central and South America, adopting Latin American identities, and learning to speak Spanish before attempting to sneak across the border. Thus, CBP should engage in expanded linguistic training for Border Patrol agents, and place an emphasis on hiring agents with native Spanish-speaking ability that are better able to detect differences in dialect and identify SIAs posing as Latin Americans.

Conclusion

Immigration and border security remain hot-button political issues in American public discourse. Policymakers can no longer afford to avoid addressing America's growing border security threats. For too long America's border security efforts have placed emphasis on unproven technology and relied solely on tactical infrastructure as the solutions to America's border security demands. While sensors and fences remain critical components of the overall border security strategy, they amount to very little without sufficient numbers of motivated and trained agents to rapidly respond to detected threats. As a result, today's border security posture has left federal, state, and local law enforcement overburdened and the majority of the U.S. border uncontrolled. While today's economic realities make procuring funds for any security endeavor more difficult, policymakers must act on their obligation to protect American citizens by enhancing border security measures. Simply put, in terms of national security priorities, none ranks higher than protecting the homeland. The U.S. Government must significantly increase the number of personnel available for border security by leveraging local law enforcement and increasing the ranks of the CBP. It must also place an increased emphasis on rapid response capabilities, intelligence-driven surge operations, proven technology, interagency coordination, and international cooperation to act as force multipliers.

About the Author

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