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**USING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS TO ADDRESS
CRITICAL THREATS TO BORDER SECURITY**

by

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Abstract

Border security improvements have certainly been made since the tragic events of 9/11, but there are still critical areas that threaten United States' borders and continue to leave the country open to future terrorist attacks. Some of the critical areas include: lack of information and intelligence sharing, sheer size of the borders and number of entry points, number of people looking to cross into the United States, weak inspection systems at customs and ports of entry, and a lack of synchronization between the federal government and local communities most directly affected by border security issues. Considering all the threats and security challenges that currently face the United States and its borders, an effective communications strategy must be implemented to earn the public's support and understanding of the initiatives needed to solve the border security problems.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss those critical areas that threaten U.S. borders and make recommendations on what can be done to improve them. Additionally, the paper will help show how an effective communications strategy can influence public opinion and put pressure on government agencies to make the changes necessary to improve the country's overall border security situation. Ultimately, it will take a joint effort between federal, state, and local officials and all U.S. citizens to tighten the borders and protect the country from future terrorist and criminal activities.

Introduction

Border security improvements have certainly been made since the tragic events of 9/11, but there are still critical areas that threaten United States' borders and continue to leave the country open to future terrorist attacks. Some of the critical areas include: lack of information and intelligence sharing, sheer size of the borders and number of entry points, number of people looking to cross into the United States, weak inspection systems at customs and ports of entry, and a lack of synchronization between the federal government and local communities most directly affected by border security issues. While addressing these critical areas, various communication outlets have been used by the media to shape the public's perception of border security. For example, the television, newspaper, and Internet outlets have been important tools for sharing information. The problem is that the media has influenced public opinion to the point where many Americans think U.S. borders are much more secure when, in reality, the borders are still extremely accessible to transnational threats. Because there is still more work that needs to be done to address the critical areas of border security, various communication methods can still play a large role in influencing positive change that ensures the country is moving in the right direction. Therefore, an effective communications strategy should be implemented that can garner the public's support and understanding of the initiatives needed to ultimately solve the critical border security issues. By properly communicating this strategy through various communication outlets, citizens will become better informed and more willing to pressure federal, state, and local politicians to make the changes necessary to tighten the borders and enhance the country's national security situation.

Critical Threats to Border Security and Recommendations

The U.S. faces many obstacles in addressing critical threats to border security. One of the more daunting problems has to do with the sheer size of the Canadian and Mexican borders and the almost endless number of entry points that must be monitored by U.S. law enforcement. The Canadian border is approximately 3,980 miles long while the Mexican border is about half as long at 1,950 miles.¹ To quickly illustrate why the borders are so difficult to regulate, Michigan's border with Canada is 721 miles, Maine's is 611 miles, and Minnesota's is 547 miles long.² As for the southern border, Arizona's border with Mexico is 350 miles long while the border from California to Texas extends out to 1,300 miles.³ These are extremely large borders that require a great number of border agents to properly watch over them. As a matter of fact, these borders are so large that a number of entry points do not have anyone monitoring them. In order to put the manning situation into perspective, there are approximately 1,664 border patrol agents along the northern border and another 9,663 at the southern border.⁴ The northern border actually has only 250 of the 1,664 agents working during any given shift because of vacation, sick leave, and other reasons which translates to approximately one agent for every 20 miles of the northern border.⁵ If the nation truly wants to have secure borders, it must have the manpower necessary to monitor and protect its vast Canadian and Mexican borders. Clearly, that is not the case. Furthermore, while most of Homeland Security's focus has been on monitoring land access points, the general coastlines also need to be protected and they extend out over 12,000 miles. When deciding on the people or technology that should be deployed in certain areas, border agents also have to consider heavy foliage, desert areas, mountains, rivers, weather, and various other factors that make the terrain difficult to observe. Because of the size of the

borders and the limited manning available to oversee them, the borders are an enormous security challenge that must be more thoroughly addressed by the U.S. government.

Another threat to border security has to do with the large number of illegal immigrants, drug smugglers, and potential terrorists that are attempting to cross the border with little to no risk of getting apprehended. As stated earlier, there just is not enough of a presence along the northern and southern borders to deter potential terrorists from coming into the U.S. According to the 9/11 commission report:

“More than 500 million people annually cross U.S. borders at legal entry points, about 330 million of them noncitizens. Another 500,000 or more enter illegally without inspections across America’s thousands of miles of land borders. The challenge for national security in an age of terrorism is to prevent the very few people who may pose overwhelming risks from entering or remaining in the United States undetected.”⁶

Because many of the entry points from both Canada and Mexico are extremely rugged and isolated, it has been virtually impossible for law enforcement to prevent illegal non-citizens from entering the country. Making this task even more difficult is the fact that law enforcement is not just dealing with land crossing it is also dealing with waterway access. In 2004 alone, border patrol agents arrested more than 650 suspected terrorists attempting to cross into the U.S. from Mexico.⁷ These arrests included Syrians, Iranians, Lebanese, and various other nationalities linked to terrorist organizations. One of the fatal flaws in the system is that many of the suspected criminals that are apprehended are rarely sent back to their country of origin. There

just is not enough evidence or history of criminal wrong-doing for the government to take serious action and deport them. According to Arizona Congressman J.D. Hayworth, “Out of the 301,046 leads received, just 4,164 were pursued, resulting in 671 apprehensions.”⁸ That is a very small number of apprehensions considering the number of leads that were actually received and brings into question how serious the U.S. government really is about border security.

Furthermore, it is fairly common for people to use fraudulent visas to gain access to the U.S. and fraudulent visas are often connected to serious issues such as terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and organized crime. The fact that over a million illegals are entering the U.S. from Mexico alone is a clear indication that border patrol agents are overwhelmed and lacking in the resources necessary to adequately control the borders. Weak border security has also contributed to the large amounts of illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroine that are making their way into the U.S. For example, approximately 300-450 metric tons of cocaine is smuggled annually into the U.S. from Mexico and incredibly only about 10% is ever seized by law enforcement.⁹ Americans spend billions of dollars on illegal drugs every year and current border security efforts have done very little to hinder drug trafficking inside the country. Overall, the U.S. must do more to reduce the number of illegal immigrants, drug smugglers, and potential terrorists entering the country.

Another consequence of allowing illegal immigrants into the country is the negative impact they have on the economy. Many businesses intentionally hire illegal immigrants to cut labor costs but that places a large economic burden on the rest of the U.S. economy. They are a burden on law enforcement, hospitals, and education systems and very few of them ever contribute to the country's tax base.¹⁰ As more immigrants enter this country illegally, they place even greater financial stress on a country that already finds itself in the midst of a financial crisis. The government must crack down on businesses that are illegally hiring immigrants and

no longer allow them to get away with breaking the law. For example, their business licenses should be suspended and held until they have clearly shown that corrective actions have been taken in accordance with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) mandates. According to former Montgomery, Al mayor Bobby Bright, “Our borders need to be secure because if we don’t – it’s a threat to our national economy and also a threat to our national security.”¹¹ Many of the southwest border states have started to see pressure at the state level to stem the flow of illegal immigration but the progress has been very slow. Politicians need to stop wasting time with all the arguing and take the steps necessary to secure the borders. Large immigrant populations not only affect the tax base and increase the burden on social services, they are also a national security issue. Countless numbers of immigrants are here illegally and cannot be accounted for which should be a great concern to the government. A guest worker program for both the northern and southern borders that can be effectively enforced is a good alternative to letting them work here illegally but that program also has a long way to go. U.S. citizens must understand the economic and security issues that are associated with illegal immigration. If the country is serious about homeland security, the government must take the steps necessary to close off the borders to all those wishing to enter the U.S. illegally.

One of the best ways to prevent some of the illegal immigrants from entering the U.S. is to continue erecting the border fence along the border with Mexico. Because millions of illegals continue to enter the U.S. and any one of them could be potential terrorists, the U.S. must extend the border fence as far along the Arizona, California, and Texas borders as possible. The current plan is to fence off about 700 miles of the 1,950 mile border between the U.S. and Mexico and to provide additional motion sensors and cameras.¹² That is a great start but the plan needs to go even further. The fence should be extended to indicate how serious the U.S. is about protecting

its southern border. According to U.S. border patrol agent Michael Bernacke, “The wall works. A lot of people have the misconception that it is a waste of time and money, but the numbers of apprehensions show that it works.”¹³ Obviously, there are some areas where traditional fences are not practical and other methods will need to be utilized. These areas can use virtual fences, a combination of cameras, sensors, unmanned aerial vehicles, and improved communications to help agents seal off the border. If the U.S. government provides more funding to increase the number of border patrol agents, implements more technology, and provides more fencing along the southern border, the border can quickly become more secure. It is an extremely difficult task but necessary to confront the number of illegal immigrants, drug smugglers, and potential terrorists that are finding their way into the U.S.

Weak inspection systems at ports of entry due to a lack of human and technological resources remain a critical weakness in border security and limit the ability of border patrol to properly inspect all personnel and vehicles entering the U.S. from Canada and Mexico. Although progress has been made, some of the better scanning systems still have not been implemented because of the high costs of integrating the latest technologies. For example, border patrol agents along the southwest border have been relying on a trip-wire system to locate people trying to enter the U.S. illegally. The problem with the trip-wire system is that agents do not know what causes the sensors to trip. Sometimes it is a person trying to enter the U.S. illegally but many times it is just a wild animal. Agents in Sasabe, Arizona just added nine 98-foot towers that feed images from cameras which can see out to four miles.¹⁴ Along with the trip-wire system, the cameras provide a common operating picture so agents know what they are dealing with before they deploy and do not waste time on animals that are tripping the sensors. The bottom line is that any information agents receive helps them make more informed decisions

regarding the best ways to use their existing manpower. This very useful technology has been very slow to develop along the northern and southern borders even though it would drastically improve border security. Since manpower will continue to be a significant problem, improved technology can certainly help offset manpower shortages. Over time, more towers will be implemented on both the northern and southern borders as well as other technologies such as unmanned ground systems, unmanned aerial systems, radars, mobile telecommunication systems, and information databases.¹⁵ These are improvements that are necessary to detect people crossing the borders illegally but one has to question why it has taken so long to implement the technology. There have been plenty of news stories about the improved border security technologies but if the government is really concerned about U.S. borders, these technologies would be implemented more expeditiously and would cover larger areas. According to Gregory Giddens who is running the Secure Border Initiative, “The new technology focuses the agent’s efforts because they now have the information that allows them to be more effective, more efficient and safer.”¹⁶ The correct blend of manpower, technology, and policy will continue to be debated by politicians for years to come but it is time for less debate and more action. It is clearly a very difficult and expensive task but the nation’s security depends on the how quickly and effectively the newest technologies can be implemented.

Resource limitations also make it impossible to inspect each container arriving at U.S. shipping ports. Because much of the cargo entering the U.S. is not scanned, criminals and terrorists are provided with a great opportunity to sneak drugs or potentially dangerous weapons into the U.S. without detection. During a homeland security special on CNN, Lou Dobbs noted that “Only five percent of cargo entering U.S. ports are even inspected.”¹⁷ That is an incredibly low percentage considering the amount of goods that flow into the U.S. annually. One of the

biggest problems is that many of the border security initiatives are completely voluntary so only pro-active businesses have taken the steps necessary to improve their inspection procedures. As mentioned earlier, funding is a significant factor and most of the financial burden to improve security efforts has been placed on states, privately held companies, and public authorities (i.e. ports).¹⁸ More emphasis needs to be placed on funding more effective inspection systems so that agents are provided with the best chance of detecting any potentially dangerous people or contraband that are trying to enter the U.S. Additionally, it would be helpful if cargo was analyzed by its country of origin even before arriving to the U.S. The information could then be sent to authorities in the U.S. who could determine if the cargo should be admitted or not. More cargo inspection redundancy would provide another layer of protection and help ensure goods are vetted properly before entering the country. Furthermore, the implementation of country-to-country information systems would help foster greater cooperation between nations and provide common standards for all cargo inspections. Port security efforts need to be increased because it is becoming just as likely that dangerous weapons or materials will come in through a U.S. shipping port as it is that they will pass through one of the many land entry points.

There are also significant human factors that are contributing to border security problems. These factors include border agents failing to engage suspicious people attempting to cross the borders, a lack of focus by the agents, and simple complacency. According to Richard Stana, Director Homeland Security and Justice Issues, “Emphasis is not being placed on all missions, and there is a failure by some of the officers to recognize the threat associated with dangerous people and goods entering the country.”¹⁹ For example, there have been many instances where travelers were not interviewed, travel documents were not closely scrutinized, and vehicles were just waived into the US without having to stop for an inspection. Since there is insufficient

staffing at many security checkpoints, some of these problems have to do with fatigue but there is no excuse for such negligence. To make matters worse, there are not enough supervisors available to monitor the effectiveness of the inspections. Additionally, a lack of training has led to more agents that are unable to recognize suspicious people, goods, and materials. It is clear that human factors are weakening the screening process at entry points where law enforcement is counted on to identify dangerous people and goods attempting to enter the U.S.

The U.S. government should do more to alleviate the financial burden on companies attempting to improve technology considering that secure borders not only protect individual states, but also the entire national economy. For example, the Ambassador Bridge alone processes thousands of trucks between Windsor, Canada and Detroit, Michigan each day and any interruptions in the movement of goods could definitely have an impact on the U.S. and Canadian economies. As stated by Noha Tohamy from Supply Management Review, “To achieve this level of security, the government must move beyond pilot programs and help fund extensive deployments of these systems across all ports.”²⁰ Vehicle-mounted gamma-ray machines are a perfect example of technology that should be subsidized by the government and introduced to all ports around the country. The gamma ray scanners are mounted on the back of a truck and provide agents with pictures of container and vehicle contents. Agents do not even have to enter vehicles or open up containers to find people or smuggled contraband. Unfortunately, the port of Seattle is one of the few places presently using the vehicle-mounted gamma ray machine. The government must certainly be smart about the pilot programs it selects and make sure they are worth the time and money but some deserve immediate implementation while others should never even be considered. For example, in August of 2008 Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) began a self-deportation program in San Diego, Chicago, Phoenix,

Charlotte, and Santa Ana California. The goal was to have illegal immigrants that were ordered by federal immigration judges to leave the country to turn themselves in so they could be rounded up and sent home without penalty. The program has been a complete failure and very few immigrants have volunteered to turn themselves in. According to an ICE spokesman, “Last year the agency arrested about 30,000 fugitive aliens in the country and, at that rate, it would take 400 years for the agency to clear through the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants now in the U.S.”²¹ It is obvious that illegal immigrants are not worried about being caught by ICE and many still prefer to provide for their families by accepting higher wages at U.S. companies than lower wages at Mexican companies. The U.S. should be selective about its pilot programs but some should move beyond the pilot process faster than others. Certain programs such as the vehicle-mounted gamma ray machines would be an immediate improvement while other programs have been and will continue to be a complete waste of time and money. If the country is serious about border security, it should focus on pilot programs that will make an immediate impact and not waste time on programs that have no chance of being successful.

Although there has been plenty of talk about the importance of synchronization between the federal government, state governments, and local authorities most affected by the border security issues, the synchronization has been very slow and deserves greater emphasis and attention. More than seven years after 9/11, there are still many networks that do not share information between federal, state, and local authorities since many agencies continue to utilize separate databases. Because federal, state, and local agencies cannot provide each other with information, there are gaps in law enforcement, intelligence, and immigration information sharing that place the country at even greater risk.²² For example, terrorist and law enforcement information that is stored on federal “watch lists” may not be provided to state and local officials

whose borders are adjacent to Canada and Mexico. This is a significant problem that needs to be fixed so that border and customs agents can properly screen individuals entering the U.S. Even at the state and local levels the terrorist, criminal, and drug databases cannot be accessed by other states which leaves the borders increasingly vulnerable to criminals and terrorist suspects. Furthermore, the federal government is still getting bogged down with intelligence reports that do not get shared and vetted at the state and local levels. State agencies will more effectively fulfill their anti-terrorism responsibilities if the intelligence community provides them with timely and accurate terrorist related information. According to The National Strategy for Homeland Security, “We must build a system of systems that can provide the right information to the right people at all times.”²³ The concept is exactly what the country needs but the initiatives have been very slow to develop. The Texas government was so concerned about linking intelligence with border security that it set up its own intelligence fusion center. Their Border Security Operations Center brought together state law enforcement, federal officers such as border patrol, game wardens, and other key contributors to border security.²⁴ Citizens need to understand that most states have not taken the steps necessary to link all the organizations that have a stake in border security. Part of the problem is that the federal government is not doing enough to help make the changes happen. According to President Bush, “State, local, and tribal entities are encouraged to undertake the activities necessary to foster a culture that recognizes the importance of fusing information regarding all crimes with national security implications, with other security related information.”²⁵ It is great to encourage these groups to implement change but it is not going to happen on its own. The government must make it mandatory and must provide state and local agencies with the necessary funding and coordination. The process must be aggressively put into action and monitored at all levels of government so that it not only

happens expeditiously but is done correctly the first time. The purchase of information systems has had very little coordination across the federal, state, and local levels so it is not surprising that information sharing is extremely limited. Ultimately, more must be done to ensure the sharing of information between agencies so that trusted agents have the ability to share, search, and analyze terrorist-related information at all levels and are provided with a secure environment for receiving actionable information.²⁶

Implementing an Effective Communications Strategy

Because there is still more work that needs to be done to address the critical areas of border security previously mentioned, an effective communications strategy should be implemented that can garner the public's knowledge and support of the initiatives needed to ultimately solve these critical border security issues. Strategic communication is important because it masses information among all agents of public information to accomplish a specific objective over a certain time period.²⁷ The overall objective in this case is to fix the border security problems that leave the country vulnerable to attack. Because U.S. citizens are an important center of gravity in addressing the threats to border security, the communications strategy must channel important information to the public so they understand the issues that are out there and can begin thinking about ways to correct them. In order for this strategy to be effective, all communication methods must work together to ensure the intended message is finding its way to a large audience. The goal is to get the message out to all citizens but, at a minimum, the message must reach out to those people living in the states that are most affected by the border security threats. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review execution roadmap makes a point of emphasizing the importance of audience selection when implementing a strategic communications plan. The execution roadmap states the importance of "Focused United States

government processes and efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen or preserve conditions favorable to advance national interests and policies through the use of coordinated information.”²⁸ By properly communicating this strategy to a broad public audience, citizens will become better informed and will help foster a culture that protects against potential border security threats.

Currently, there is not an effective tool that the government uses for providing information to the public in a synchronized and comprehensive way. The government needs to find a way to make the border security situation clear to average Americans that are not well versed on the topic. As mentioned earlier, many people believe the borders are significantly safer because there has not been a serious incident since 9/11 and the media has certainly done its part to make it seem that way. There is no specific guidance to help average citizens truly understand the border situation so they can help address the security challenges facing the U.S. According to the State Department, “Communicating strategically during a war on global terrorism should be an urgent part of the mission of every arm of the U.S. government.”²⁹ This is a great statement because it applies to communicating an important message to every segment of the government. The problem is that the government does not spend enough time communicating the border security situation to average citizens. A comprehensive approach that involves all forms of communication – television, radio, internet, formal education, etc- is necessary so that U.S. citizens become better informed and hopefully more actively involved with making this country a safer place to live.

Each state’s homeland security bureau should interact more with its citizens so that they are more knowledgeable on border security and are prepared to take the steps necessary to deter potential terrorists. There is very little risk education available from the Homeland Security

websites and in order for individuals to assist in civil security, they must truly understand the threat of terrorist attacks.³⁰ Therefore, their websites should become more relevant by including information on the steps citizens can take to help homeland security do their job. There are plenty of advisories but very little on risk education. Most of the website's advisories focus on incidents involving or threatening to target critical infrastructure or assets important to state and local authorities. Even the color coded system which most Americans became familiar with after 9/11 has become almost irrelevant because it is stressed very little these days and the information does not apply to specific cities or states. It is important to continually educate people on the specific risks they face at home and to give them guidance on what they can do as citizens. The homeland security website provides good information but the site needs to become a more useful educational tool for average Americans. People need to understand what threats are out there, what actions terrorists might take, and what they can do to help prevent future attacks. A Gallup poll taken in 2001 after 9/11 revealed that 65 percent of American citizens did not feel there was any reason to be afraid of terrorists because the country was unlikely to see another attack any time soon.³¹ It is safe to conclude that this percentage has gradually increased since there has not been an attack on U.S. soil in over seven years and the fact is many Americans really do have short term memories. Homeland security must do a better job of disseminating information to the public so that Americans do not get complacent or become unaware of the actual border security situation.

Government agencies also need to completely understand the different ways that are available to communicate with a public that uses the Internet more than traditional communication sources. In the past there were only a few ways to communicate with people over long distances such as telephones, letters, telegrams, and faxes but these methods limited

the rapid spread of information. People are social creatures and since communication is the heart of the Internet, it explains why it has grown so significantly over the years. It allows for rapid interactive communication between groups and also combines media with words, sounds, pictures, and videos to relay messages to the public.³² Although traditional methods such as the newspaper and radio can and should still be utilized by the government for sharing information with the public, the Internet has opened up a whole new dimension and offers various other means to effectively communicate with people. Whether it is electronic mail (email), newsgroups, social networks, blogs, chat rooms, or even online education and retrieval sources, the government has plenty of Internet options available to share border security information with the public. The question is whether the government is taking full advantage of the Internet to communicate more effectively and efficiently with the nation.

Since people rarely use the postal service to communicate anymore, it only makes sense that the government should use more electronic mail (email) correspondence to share border security information. Email makes it extremely easy to reach out and share information with a large audience and it is fairly inexpensive to communicate via the cyber world. For example, Buffalo border patrol agents unveiled a new technology called Radio Frequency Identification in November of 2008. This technology forces people to hold up their identification card to an electronic scanner before they pull up to a check point so that agents can check their personal information. In this case, wide spread email notification is an excellent way for people to find out about the new technology and identification requirements that are coming to the U.S./Canadian borders. The government should also provide the public with the option of signing up to receive additional information so that people who are more interested in border security can receive frequent newsletters or updates. The important thing here is for the

government to remain in contact with people so they are more informed and educated on border security issues. Some people may decline or ignore the information and many may not even have access to the Internet, but the goal here is to simply reach out and touch as many people as possible. Because of its continued growth in popularity, email can be a very useful way for the government to initiate and facilitate the sharing of information with the general public.

The Internet is also changing how news is distributed to the public and traditional communications methods such as newspaper and television are not necessarily the best way to get information anymore. Because of the move to the Internet, the government should also use more electronic newsgroups. They are similar to reading the newspaper, except they are read online and focus on specific topics such as border security.³³ This form of media not only links people who are interested in border security, but also leads to the development of discussion groups where people can read and discuss the topic with others. Government agencies could also take things a step further by having someone such as a homeland security expert facilitate and consolidate communication between discussion groups.³⁴ By linking people who share common interests, people can meet and discuss border security issues online and collaborate on future initiatives and policy changes. Online or virtual communities should also be established geographically so that people in border areas such as Buffalo, Detroit, or Seattle can meet online and discuss problems that are occurring in their cities. Considering that over 30 million people cross the Buffalo and Detroit ports-of-entry and another 20 million pass through the Seattle district each year, people in these areas should be working together to explore border security issues.³⁵ This cooperation will help enhance community spirit, awareness, and engagement in the geographic regions that are most affected by the border security issues. One of the positive aspects of these virtual communities is that they can be established by a government agency or

just by interested citizens who are looking to bring greater awareness to the border security problems that exist in the U.S. Additionally, it is important for states to share information through secure Internet portals to discuss emergent threats and topics of interest. A virtual community of states would ensure that information can be shared quickly and responsibly and would help fuse intelligence crucial to meeting future threats to homeland security. These are fairly ambitious projects that may require more time to develop simply because of tighter budgets under President Obama's administration. Overall, community and government networking through online communities can ensure there is information sharing and a sense of teamwork between states and their citizens.

Similar to discussion groups, social networks have also grown in popularity over the years and can be found everywhere on the Internet. Sites like MySpace and Facebook not only allow for communication between friends but also link people with similar interests. For example, people that are interested in an important cause such as improving inspection systems at U.S. borders can communicate their messages very easily through Facebook. Their sphere of influence continues to expand as they pass information on to friends and family who then pass this information on to others. It is basically a tree that just continues to grow more branches as more people are linked through a common cause on the web. Sites like Facebook can help persuade people to take a greater interest in shaping the border security environment. Additionally, news networks such as Fox News and MSNBC have sites on Facebook that can be used to provide news and information to the public. The important thing to understand is that these sites can use the power of social networking to spread important border security information to almost anyone using a social network.

Web logs (Blogs) are another form of Internet communication that is increasing in popularity, especially among the younger generation. Blogs allow people to use online posts to read and comment on subjects that are of particular interest to them. If the government finds a useful way to use blogs, they will have a tremendous tool for discussing border security topics with a large number of people. The key for government agencies running these blogs is to establish a reputable blogging site that remains proactive and engaged with its audience. Increased discussions with bloggers can actually help educate citizens on important border security issues such as the lack of information and intelligence sharing between federal, state, and local agencies. Bloggers, both young and old, can even help homeland security officials identify potential terrorists that are utilizing blogs to communicate with people inside and outside the country. The government can also extend its search of the Internet to find blogs and message boards that terrorists are using to plan future attacks on the U.S. Since more and more terrorists are using the Internet to plan attacks, recruit members, and spread propaganda, blogs would be a great place for the government and U.S. citizens to team up and defend against potential border security threats. According to Thomas Frank from the USA Today, "Blogging and message boards have played a substantial role in allowing communication among those who would do the United States harm."³⁶ Although blogs are being used by people wanting to harm the U.S., they can also be used by the government and average citizens to spread positive messages that influence others to not inflict damage on the country. In other words, blogs can be used as an effective form of soft power used by both government agencies and citizens to protect U.S. borders from potential terrorists. If there are less people that want to hurt the U.S. then there are less people that border security has to worry about identifying and apprehending. Overall,

engaging blogs should be a substantial part of a good communication strategy that aims to address the critical threats to border security.

Chat rooms are another place where people with similar interests can meet and share border security information from their computer. Since chat rooms have become the preferred method of communication for young and old alike, there is a great opportunity for information sharing and education to occur through this domain. The U.S. government should continue to own and operate chat rooms in order to broadcast specific border security messages to the public. By moderating these government controlled chat rooms, agencies can block messages that are off topic, undesirable, or misleading to the public.³⁷ The government should also actively engage non-government chat rooms in order to provide accurate border security information to the public. There is a lot of information shared through chat rooms that is inaccurate or misleading and therefore does not communicate the right message to the public. If an agency is actively engaging chat rooms, it can dispel rumors and also provide additional viewpoints on the border security situation. The answer may be as simple as just guiding people to a homeland security link where they can discover border security information and find answers on their own. Since chat rooms are used every day and are popular with many people, it is essential that the government engage these sites in order to share information on the problems out there and what the government is doing to solve them.

Another communication method gaining in popularity involves the combination of traditional television with the power of the Internet. Homeland Security Television Channel (HSTV) is the world's first online, on-demand television network dedication to homeland security.³⁸ Its programming provides increased awareness of the technologies and services available to the U.S. government and its critical security infrastructure. The site provides

features such as blogging and discussion groups for people interested in border security and identifies problems and lessons learned for anyone interested in the topic. This is just another form of communication that is available to help educate government agencies and the public so they can work together to influence positive changes to border security. The site combines the strengths of television and the Internet to increase awareness among all its viewers.

Unfortunately, many people do not know about the site and therefore do not take the time to view it. As part of an effective communications strategy, the government should work in concert with private media organizations such as HSTV to advertise and get information out to the public. Additionally, the government should use the information and analysis from HSTV to identify border security weaknesses that need more emphasis and correction. The show could be a real eye opener for both the public and government agencies if a thoughtful approach is taken to HSTV's in-depth analysis. Online, on-demand television networks, if effectively utilized, can be a tremendous asset for providing border security information to the public.

One of the oldest forms of communication, radio, should still be part of an effective communication strategy and should not be discounted. Many people listen to the radio while going to work or lounging at home so it is a reliable way to communicate with the general public. Therefore, government agencies must ensure they are working with radio stations to provide border security information to the public. This information could include anything from port security improvements to illegal border crossings but the important thing here is to at least find a way to get more stories out through the radio. Radio talk shows such as Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity have an enormous public following and prove that radio can still thrive in today's media environment. There is no question that talk radio can still play an important role considering that 17% of the public still listens to radio shows that discuss the news, local issues,

and politics.³⁹ Although it would be helpful to have a homeland security radio show to reach out to nationwide audiences, that probably will not happen so there is no reason that smaller, more regional radio stations could not be used. For example, Texas A&M University has its own radio station that produces two weekly radio programs each week focusing on homeland security. The radio show is titled “Homeland Security Inside and Out” and features interviews with leaders at the federal, state, and local levels and also brings in leaders from the private sector.⁴⁰ The radio show addresses a variety of topics each week and brings greater awareness to its students, faculty, and the general public. Although the radio show is primarily limited to the local audience, it is a great example of how relatively small radio talk shows can help educate people on homeland security topics. In order to further demonstrate how Texas A&M understands how communication methods continue to evolve, the radio show is also issuing its programs as podcasts via Texas A&M’s iTunes University to reach out to a greater number of people. Because radio remains a part of the American way of life, it has a place in an effective communication strategy and should be utilized in conjunction with other forms of communication.

Beyond radio, television is another traditional form of communication that can still be used to educate the public. For example, ABC aired a homeland security series in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security in early 2009. This is the kind of outside of the box thinking that should be used to keep people interested and informed on border security issues. To produce the series, Homeland Security gave ABC “unprecedented access to the agencies including Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Transportation and Security Administration, and the Coast Guard.”⁴¹ It is this kind of joint venture between government agencies and civilian media networks that can bring a greater

public understanding of the border security issues that face U.S. citizens and government agencies. The show provides viewers with insight into issues border agents are busy dealing with every day at U.S. entry points like Los Angeles International Airport, Pacific Northwest (Washington), Arizona and California.⁴² By focusing on border patrol officials and their work in protecting the U.S. on land, air, and sea, people will have a greater understanding of the difficult tasks facing agents, areas that still need improvement, and the things that everyday citizens can do to support government agencies. For example, people that watch the show will understand the need for increased border security manpower and funding. Considering the fact that 38% of Americans say they regularly watch cable news networks such as CNN, FOX, and MSNBC and another 34% regularly watch one of the three major networks each day, television still has the ability of educating a large number of citizens.⁴³ Television can play an important role in educating citizens and influencing change so the government must use it to spread important border security messages and information.

The public also needs to be reminded of where to find information so they understand the threats are very real and the terrorists will indeed look for an opportunity to strike again. Because there are still many people that do not have access to a computer or do not go looking for the information, stories need to be provided through various media sources. Other than the Internet, radio, and television, another way to educate the populace can be through the newspaper. There should be a homeland security education section included in the Sunday newspaper that helps educate people on the current border security problems that exist in their areas of the country. While homeland security does provide basic terrorist threat information for the newspapers, it does not provide the necessary education so citizens know what to look for and how to help. Homeland security has missed the mark in this area and has lost a tremendous

opportunity to interact with U.S. citizens to protect the homeland. Citizens should feel a sense of ownership and responsibility toward border security and, since it affects everyone, local newspapers should be used to reach out and educate people on critical threats to border security and their impact on every day life.

Risk Management

Risk management is also an important part of any communication strategy and must therefore be considered before information is shared with the public. Federal, state, and local agencies should always try to provide accurate information to the public without causing high levels of fear and anxiety. Citizens should know about and understand the problems that exist and have realistic expectations as to what is being done to address them. Additionally, in order to effectively manage risk, federal, state and local officials, in partnership with business interests and other relevant community based groups, must have on-going discussions regarding the implementation of the policies that affect their lives.⁴⁴ For example, since the government knows that border patrol hiring initiatives have fallen short of the government's goals, they should let the people know that it is a problem and discuss how to fix it. If all sides are able to clearly communicate, collaborate, and think creatively about the border security problems, agencies will be able to discuss border security needs with citizens without inducing panic or mass hysteria. Because there are many people who do not trust the government to take the steps necessary to protect them, the government needs to slowly build trust and credibility through continued openness, competence, and commitment on the border security issues. By sharing information in this manner, communication will become a two-way street between all stakeholders and a greater emphasis will be placed on finding a common understanding of the border security issues. There may be bad press that initially causes concern or debate between

different groups but that is one of the advantages of open communication. With all the bad news out of the way, the government and its citizens can focus on effectively exchanging information that can lead to better long-term solutions. This approach will help manage perceptions of the border security problems and provide average citizens with an avenue for providing additional viewpoints that could be beneficial in finding solutions. On the other hand, when people are not provided with an adequate amount of information, they make judgments based on their own perceptions of the border security situation and that may lead to even greater concern and uncertainty. Therefore, an effective communication strategy will get more mileage if the government is completely honest and transparent to citizens. Obviously, not all information can be shared because of operational security but risk can certainly be better managed if the public is given as much information as possible. People may initially lose some faith in the government's ability to protect them but, in the long run, it will influence people to get more involved in improving the border security situation. Overall, an effective communication strategy that creates greater awareness and cooperation on border security problems will ultimately help in the risk management process.

Conclusion

Although there have not been any attacks in the U.S. since the tragic events of 9/11, the United States still has a long way to go in protecting its borders and ensuring the safety of its citizens. This paper briefly mentioned what, in my opinion, are some of the more critical border security issues but there are numerous other areas that also need to be resolved. According to Barbara Nadel from the Homeland Security Channel, "As the United States witnessed after 9/11, vulnerabilities are often magnified and addressed, but not necessarily immediately corrected, after a catastrophic disaster."⁴⁵ It certainly takes time to conquer an enormous task such as

border security but there is no question that the government has been very slow in developing and implementing many of the improvements necessary to eliminate some of the threats.

Therefore, the government must employ an effective communications strategy that engages both the public and the media. By properly communicating border security issues through the various communication outlets, the country will have more educated citizens and there will be greater momentum for federal, state, and local politicians to make the changes necessary to strengthen U.S. borders. Unity of effort between all levels of government and the general public will help heighten awareness, manage risk, and eventually enhance the country's border security situation. Citizens that are more informed and more alert to the problems will have a greater desire to fix them. Therefore, measures of effectiveness for this strategy cannot simply focus on the number of drugs or illegal aliens crossing the border or the percentage of goods and materials getting inspected, but must also include an evaluation of the willingness of the government, the public, and the media in taking a more active and cooperative role in engaging the threats. Overall, an effective communications strategy is critical to gaining the public's support and understanding of the initiatives needed to solve the critical border security issues facing the United States.

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 - ⁷ Hayworth, Whatever it Takes, pg. 6.
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 - ¹⁰ Kitchen, The Issue: Immigration, pg. 1A.
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