

COUNTERING GANG VIOLENCE: WHAT SMALL TOWN COMMUNITIES CAN LEARN FROM THE US MILITARY

BY

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**COUNTERING GANG VIOLENCE: WHAT SMALL TOWN COMMUNITIES CAN
LEARN FROM THE US MILITARY**

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the current efforts of the city of Salinas, who, working with advisors from the Naval Post Graduate school are using lessons learned from the battlefields of Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines and Latin America to devise a counter-gang strategic implementation plan. The Mission and Execution portions of this paper will also serve as the base document for the implementation plan. Currently, the project is in the final stages of completion and is expected to be employed summer, 2011. If applied appropriately, the process and tactical implementation of this collaboration could prove to be the turning point in stemming the violence that gave Salinas a homicide rate three times that of Los Angeles in 2009 and assist Salinas in regaining the critical support of its population.ⁱ Additionally, it will also serve as a model for other smaller cities in the US with similar challenges. The city of Salinas strategic planning group is continuing to develop their respective agency annexes and will update the base plan accordingly upon completion.

BACKGROUND

Located approximately 18 miles east from the Monterey Peninsula in central California, Salinas is known as the birthplace of John Steinbeck and as the “Salad Bowl” of America, a nod to the fact that the Salinas Valley produces up to 80% of the nation’s lettuce demand.ⁱⁱ This scenic valley, the backdrop for so many of Steinbeck’s novels possesses some of the most fertile soil in the US.

The city is also home to two of the most notorious Hispanic gangs operating in the US. The Nuestra Familia and the Mexican Mafia have approximately 11 factions each operating on the streets of Salinas. Also identified as “Nortenos” and “Surenos” respectively, they represent roughly 2% of the population in the City; and were responsible for 100% of the homicides in 2009 and 84% of the homicides in 2010.ⁱⁱⁱ

The decades long gang violence now impacts 100% of the Salinas community, negatively affecting businesses, public health, academic achievement, economic development and has significantly lead to the deterioration of family and community.^{iv} Worse still, the Salinas police are currently under resourced, possessing 157 sworn officers to serve a city of approximately 146,000.^v The city also sustained a setback in its anti-gang efforts due to the voters turning down a proposed 1% tax increase in July 2009, resulting in no growth for an already beleaguered police force.^{vi} Additionally, many of Salinas’ social services face the same funding issues as the police. Lack of resources and ongoing budget cuts leave the critical agencies ill equipped to face the significant challenges posed by the gangs and limit their ability to attend to the underlying issues contributing to violence.

According to the Mayor of Salinas, Dennis Donohue, 10 to 15% of the families in Salinas include a gang member.^{vii} This is indicative of a population that does not fully support the City’s efforts to defeat the gangs and control the violence. Apart from possible ties to gangs, trust and fear play a role in the gangs’ support within the population. Many of Salinas’ residents simply do not trust the police. Additionally, members of the population fear they would face retaliation from the gangs if they were viewed as collaborating with the police.^{viii} In short, Salinas is unable to connect with its population in a collective effort to dissuade support to the gangs.

In 2008, Salinas began implementation of the Ceasefire model developed at Harvard University.^{ix} 2010 saw an over 40% decrease in gang related homicides as a result. However, limited resources do not allow for full implementation of the model. Gang members have participated in ‘call-ins’ where they are threatened with the full arm of the law if they commit violent crime, however, in 2010, only 5 arrests were made in 15 gang related homicides indicating the perpetrators were still able to move freely within the population. City officials are acutely aware that much more must be accomplished in a ‘whole of government’ approach to solve the complex population centric problem of gang violence.

To assist the city of Salinas in this endeavor, Mayor Donohue requested assistance from NPS in February, 2009.^x Since then, representatives from the Department of Defense Analysis

as well as the NPS Center for Homeland Defense and Security have been working in a collaborative effort to assist Salinas in developing a long term strategy to defeat the gangs. The NPS representatives function in an advisory role during planning - leveraging both positive and negative lessons learned from recent US military operations. Additionally, the advisors are using the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) as a template to guide the planning process and have been highly instrumental as facilitators and to some extent, moderators during the discussions resulting from city and county agencies and their respective points of view.

Similar to current and former US efforts in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines and Latin America, the key to success for the Salinas strategy will be in changing the attitudes and behavior of the local population. The overwhelming success on the island of Basilan in 2002 in the southern Philippines against the al-Qaeda (AQ) affiliated Abu Syayf terrorist group is viewed as a positive example of influencing the local population to change its behavior. Likewise, the combination of the 2006 US Surge and Sunni Awakening proved the critical factors in swaying the population away from AQ and in support of the Iraqi government. In Afghanistan, the US is continuing its efforts to gradually influence the population to change its behavior to increase support of the Afghan government. All of these highly complex and dynamic efforts have relied on long term strategic plans and have required a tremendous amount of patience and persistent presence. A unity of effort between the US and Coalition partners at the national, provincial and local levels has been instrumental to the success of these operations. Additionally, all have required a balanced approach to kinetic strikes and non- kinetic operations as well as an understanding of potential impacts to the population.

Although Salinas' problem set has differences, the keys to success are not different. A long term strategy requiring patience, a persistent presence, and unity of effort between local, state, federal and volunteer agencies will be critical to the success of a domestic anti-gang strategy. In devising a strategic implementation plan, Salinas has also considered the populations' potential response to any proposed actions, including a systemic approach to building community networks at the local level that can synchronize and leverage all available resources to influence the population. Planners are also factoring in a balanced approach to ensure their kinetic operations complement non-kinetic actions and are devising branch plans and sequels that offer the best chance of withstanding the changes in annual budgets, resources and political cycles.

The Mission and Execution portions of this document will serve as the draft base plan for the City of Salinas and are based on the City of Salinas and NPS bi-monthly meetings dating back to February, 2009.^{xi} The City of Salinas strategic planning group is continuing to develop their respective agency annexes and will update the base plan accordingly upon completion. All details associated with the Mission and Execution portions of this base plan were reviewed and updated during the most recent Salinas strategic planning session held 19 Apr, 2011 at Salinas City Hall.^{xii}

MISSION

The City of Salinas and their County, State and Federal Partners will implement: ‘Para Nuestro Futuro’ ‘For our Future’ beginning June 1, 2011 in order to reduce the overall violence in Salinas and create the conditions that foster an environment for widespread community engagement to realize the ultimate goal of ‘A City at Peace’.^{xiii}

EXECUTION

1. Mayor’s Intent^{xiv}

- a. End State: A City at Peace - Teamwork between community based organizations, schools, concerned citizens, service groups, and law enforcement to provide positive alternatives for non-violent lifestyles and build mentoring relationships with youth who have the highest risk of gang involvement to ensure they become productive members of society
- b. Key tasks:
 - i. Reduce gang related violence
 - ii. Increase input and commitment from all community members/groups
 - iii. Overcome community apathy and fear
 - iv. Reach out to at risk youth ages 10 to 18
 - v. Provide the resources necessary for them to abstain from a gang lifestyle
 - vi. Address Community Alliance for Safety and Peace (CASP) focus points as indicated in the Salinas Comprehensive Strategy 2010-2012
 1. Social and economic conditions
 2. Engaging and supervising youth
 3. Environmental design and urban planning
 4. Law enforcement
 5. Education and schools
 6. Impact of drugs and alcohol

2. Lines of Operations^{xv}

The lines of operations are focused on building community based organizations with a priority of effort towards prevention, intervention, suppression and prosecution of gangs and gang affiliated activities. These priorities along with two other critical enablers, economics and information operations (IO) will be incorporated throughout the strategic implementation plan (depicted in figure 1).

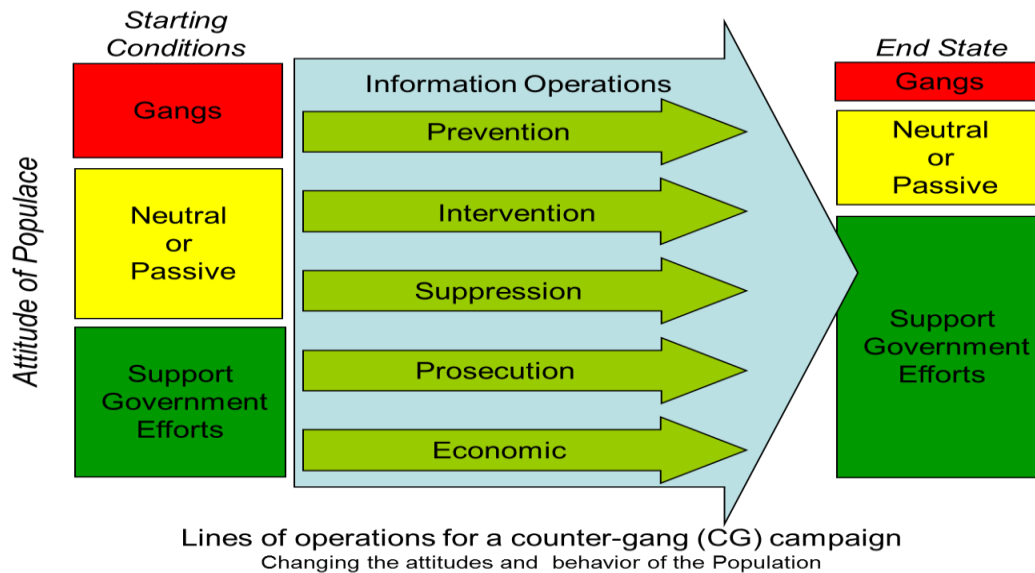


Figure1. Salinas' Lines of Operations

3. Concept of Operations^{xvi}

The main effort during execution will initially be focused in one community of Salinas and will consist of massing limited resources in a whole of government approach to eventually effect community engagement in defeating the gangs. When the indicators are present signaling the population is supporting the government through action based community engagement against the gangs and are 'in control of their neighborhood', the next phase of the strategic plan will take effect in another specified area. In this fashion, the city will continue to build upon its success until all areas of Salinas are executing community based engagement to defeat the gangs and in theory, over time, realize the Mayor's end-state; 'A City at Peace'.

a. Concept Specifics^{xvii}

The implementation plan will be conducted in multiple phases both sequentially and simultaneously. During phase 1, the main effort will consist of a surge of concentrated and concerted government and non-governmental actions within the community of Hebbro Heights (Figure 2.) The objective is to engage and positively influence the population within Hebbro to change the prevailing current attitudes and behavior that allow gangs to operate with impunity.

To accomplish this, the City of Salinas along with its other governmental and non-governmental partners will first address some of the underlying conditions that have contributed to the proliferation of gangs and gang activity. Additionally, while Salinas is conducting a very focused and targeted effort within Hebbro, other distributed smaller scale efforts will be conducted throughout the greater Salinas area. These economy of scale, distributed efforts will be linked to the initial main effort in Hebbro and also assist in shaping the overall strategic plan. Once the indicators are present that Hebbro is capable of self-community policing, Salinas will shift its main effort from Hebbro to another community (TBD), but will continue to provide a

smaller scale supporting effort in Hebbroon. This approach will be duplicated in every community within Salinas until all communities are capable of self-policing.

Critical to this mission will be Salinas' ability to actually 'connect' with the population. This will be accomplished by earning their trust, confidence, meeting basic needs (based on an initial community assessment), maintaining a balanced approach to both kinetic and non-kinetic actions and ultimately leveraging the power of the people to eventually self-police. Maintaining complete transparency and incorporating a media campaign with consistent messaging will also be critical to success.

b. Initial Entry and Assessment^{xviii}

When directed, Salinas will establish a base of operations at the Hebbroon Community Center in order to facilitate Salinas Cross Functional Teams' synchronization of operations to include; command and control, communications, operations and intelligence fusion, strategic messaging and community engagement. Once the Cross Functional Teams have established their base of operations, they will next conduct an assessment of the current conditions within Hebbroon. The base plan will then be modified as appropriate to reflect results from the assessment which in turn, will facilitate the overall success within Hebbroon.

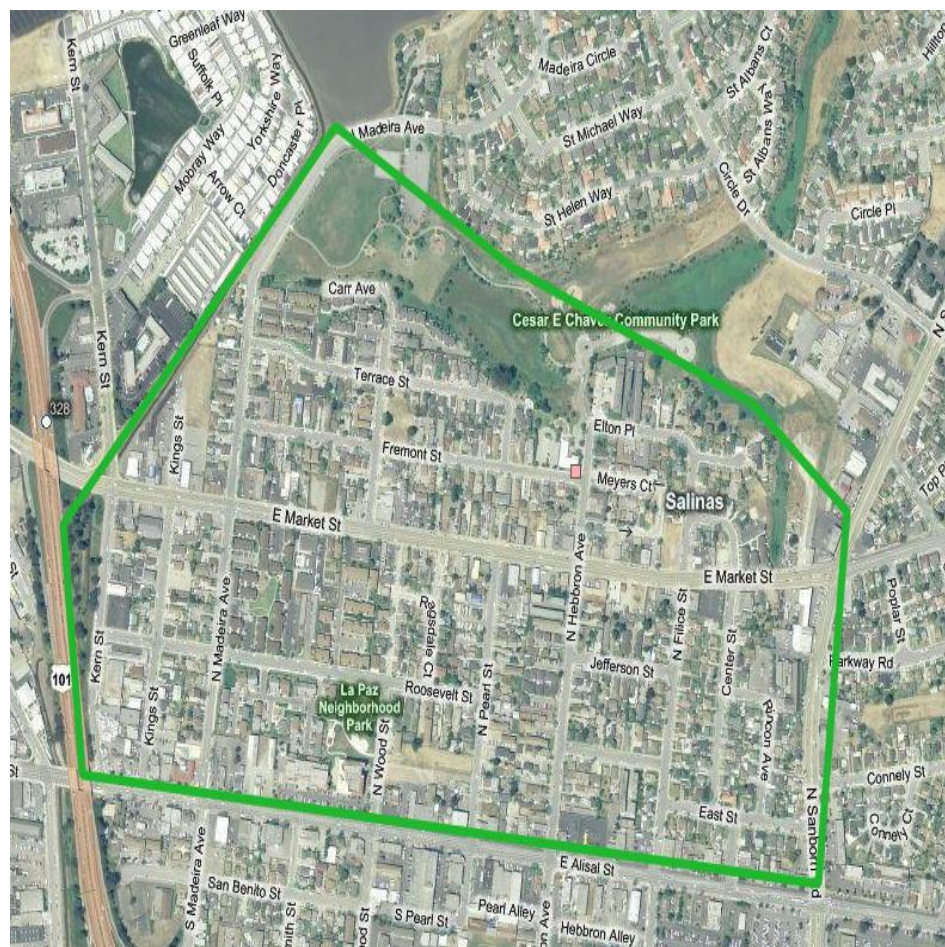


Figure 2. Hebbroon Heights

4. Tasks to Agencies and Measures of Effectiveness^{xix}

a. Police Tasks

- i. Use community policing model and increase manpower in Hebbbron to meet Mayor's Intent
- ii. Implement patrols and other activities designed to engage with the population
- iii. Participate in cross functional teams and be prepared to lead as required
- iv. Conduct probation and parole sweeps within Hebbbron Heights
- v. Conduct oscillating enforcement 'Periodic surges'

b. Police Measures of Effectiveness

- i. Violent crime decreases in Hebbbron including:
 1. Assaults
 2. Battery
 3. Robbery
 4. Homicides
- ii. Non Violent crime decreases in Hebbbron including:
 1. Vandalism
 2. Property crime
 3. Malicious mischief
 4. Increased small business revenue
- iii. Improved community engagement
 1. Increased number of positive interactions with Hebbbron residents
 2. Higher attendance at community meetings
 3. Door to door acceptance
 4. Increase in We-Tips from Hebbbron residents
 5. Increased situational awareness

c. Salinas Mayor and City Council Tasks

- i. Articulate plan to population prior to implementation
- ii. Attend selected community events
- iii. Engage with cross functional teams periodically
- iv. Articulate the progress and/or explain negative events in Hebbbron linked to 'Para Nuestro Futuro' campaign

d. Salinas Mayor and City Council Measures of Effectiveness

- i. Increased number of Hebbbron residents attending community events related to campaign
- ii. Higher percentage of residents 'know a city representative'. Baseline for 93905 currently at 24.3%^{xx}
- iii. Community leaders have increased dialogue and open channels of communication with the Mayor's office
- iv. Potential initial resistance from areas other than Hebbbron subsides with Mayor's communication of the overall plan

- e. Second Chance (Youth based NGO) Tasks
 - i. Participate in cross functional team and take the lead as required
 - ii. Assist in identifying community persons of influence
 - iii. Communicate overall concept to key individuals in preparation for implementation
 - iv. Initial lead in door to door canvassing
 - v. Assist cross functional team with crisis counseling and referrals as appropriate
 - vi. Report internal gang atmospherics, i.e. growth or decrease in numbers or activity
 - vii. Intervene as appropriate to de-escalate tensions or potential incidents while maintaining confidence of clients
 - viii. Serve as major promoter of current campaign messaging and any updates
 - ix. Attend community meetings within Hebbbron on regular basis
- f. Second Chance (Youth based NGO) Measures of Effectiveness
 - i. Increase in number of gang members and associates seeking services
 - ii. Increase in We-Tips regarding crime in Hebbbron Heights
 - iii. Greater acceptance during door to door canvassing
 - iv. Decrease in 10-14 age group joining gangs
- g. Behavioral Health Tasks
 - i. Assign a therapist to the police department to provide services to youth arrested for lesser crimes (initially focused on Hebbbron residents)
 - ii. Provide member for cross functional team and take the lead as required
 - iii. Attend community meetings, canvass door to door, conduct intervention as required
 - iv. Engage with local schools on behavioral health issues
 - v. Be prepared to assist with crisis counseling an any time during day/night
 - vi. Assist in referrals and fund limited parent education
- h. Behavioral Health Measures of Effectiveness
 - i. Increase in referrals
 - ii. Increased participation in expanded services
 - iii. Increase in school attendance by those receiving services
- i. Social Services (Adults and Children) Tasks
 - i. Provide increased services to Hebbbron
 - 1. Contract to provide early intervention
 - 2. Provide a child welfare liaison to SPD
 - ii. Provide member for cross functional team and be prepared to take lead as required
 - iii. Coordinate and synchronize with Operation Ceasefire efforts
 - 1. Employment
 - 2. Training

- iv. Coordinate with police to determine high risk individuals and households
- v. Leverage State, County and municipal agencies that can provide additional social services
- j. Social Services (Adults and Children) Measures of Effectiveness
 - i. Increased social services to qualifying families in Hebbbron
 - 1. Job training
 - 2. Access to public assistance programs
 - ii. Universal services linked to Operation Ceasefire
 - iii. Improved collaboration with police on child welfare
- k. County Probation and Parole Department Tasks
 - i. Provide a member to cross functional teams and be prepared to take the lead as required
 - ii. Identify youth participants in probation/California Youth Organization (CYO) programs within Hebbbron and provide list to cross functional teams
 - iii. Coordinate with schools to identify truants and take appropriate action
 - iv. Increase probation sweeps
 - v. Facilitate safe transit routes to schools for Hebbbron residents
 - vi. Exercise flexible response options towards truants and other youths
 - vii. Provide follow up engagement for students leaving youth programs and returning to Hebbbron
 - viii. Identify potential youth mentors from returning students
- l. County Probation and Parole Measures of Effectiveness
 - i. Increased attendance in schools for Hebbbron youths
 - ii. Increased number of Hebbbron youth linked to services
 - iii. Less vandalism, graffiti, malicious mischief in Hebbbron
 - iv. Safer school transit routes – agency to provide baseline with surveys to schools
- m. Education Tasks
 - i. Provide member to cross functional team
 - ii. Make electronic communication (Connect-Ed) available to other agencies to distribute information in Hebbbron
 - iii. Provide continuing education to families in Hebbbron based on recent grant
 - iv. Increase participation in English as Second Language (ESL) Education
 - v. Increase Graduation Equivalent Diploma (GED) Opportunities
 - vi. Establish alternatives to out of school suspensions for students with no adult supervision.
 - vii. Identify potential at-risk youth to the cross functional teams
 - viii. Conduct surveys to determine safe school zones and provide results to police department, probation, and Silver Star
- n. Education Measures of Effectiveness

- i. Higher average daily attendance rates from schools supporting Hebbbron students
 - ii. Increased graduation rates among Hebbbron students
 - iii. Less vandalism, graffiti, malicious mischief in Hebbbron
 - iv. Increased parent and community involvement in education and school activities
 - v. Producing better English speakers and high school graduation equivalents for adults
- o. Library Tasks
 - i. Create a physical and electronic resource center at library encompassing:
 - 1. Education
 - 2. Employment opportunities
 - 3. Health
 - 4. Crime
 - ii. Market library capabilities for Hebbbron residents to include how to use above referenced resource center
 - iii. Engage youth currently using library as refuge
- p. Library Measures of Effectiveness
 - i. Increased number of Hebbbron residents utilizing library services
 - 1. Number of books checked out
 - 2. Library cards issued (37,000 students have cards)
 - 3. Requests for information on government services
 - ii. Increased attendance in classes being offered
 - iii. Increased volunteer/community service hours being offered
- q. Faith Community Tasks
 - i. Provide member for cross functional team and be prepared to lead as required
 - ii. Permit faith based organization (FBO) facilities that serve the Hebbbron community to be used for community programs/events
 - iii. Assist in identifying community volunteers to help with mentoring youth, and literacy education
 - iv. Provide list of services being provided by FBOs in area to cross functional teams
 - v. Provide liaison to police department
- r. Faith Community Measures of Effectiveness
 - i. Increase in volunteers from faith based community
 - ii. Development of new services and/or programs
 - iii. Existing services used more effectively
 - iv. Increased connectivity of youths to active programs
- s. Communications Team Tasks

- i. Develop over-arching narrative that explains the “Para Nuestro Futuro” “For Our Future” campaign
 - 1. The neighborhood as the nucleus of change
 - ii. Synchronize messaging across agencies
 - iii. Articulate the importance of community involvement for the future
 - iv. Provide timely and accurate incident information and its importance to the narrative
 - v. Use “Connect-Ed” as required to communicate with Hebbbron residents
 - vi. Provide communication support to agencies as needed
 - vii. Collaborate with local colleges and universities to help develop our communication
 - viii. Communicate the consequences of criminal activity
 - ix. Elaborate peer-to-peer (P2P) mentoring capabilities
 - x. Promoting the positive activities of local youth and acknowledge achievement
 - 1. Create “positive peer pressure”
 - xi. Develop a program of awards for citizens
 - xii. Educate/train agencies about how to better effectively communicate (message discipline)
 - xiii. Customize messages to match events so that each message does not sound the same
 - xiv. When directed, following completion of implementation plan, work with community leaders to gain their approval/commitment
- t. Communications Team Measures of Effectiveness
 - i. Unified messaging (not scripted) evident at all levels
 - ii. Increased numbers of City and County agency personnel trained and educated to properly communicate
 - iii. Community displays indicators of change
 - 1. People begin to use the words of the campaign themselves
 - 2. Increase in general awareness of plan
 - 3. Accurate reporting in the media
 - 4. Salinas at large responds positively to actions in Hebbbron
- u. Department of Recreation Tasks
 - i. Provide Community Center facilities to ‘plant the flag’ in support of community engagement
 - ii. Extend hours at Community Center as required for community meetings
 - iii. Coordinate with local colleges and universities (CSUMB, Hartnell, etc.) to facilitate volunteerism in support of government agencies
- v. Department of Recreation Measures of Effectiveness
 - i. Family Center becomes hub for information gathering and post crisis response synchronization

- ii. Community Center viewed as symbol of “For Our Future” campaign
 - iii. Volunteerism increases within Hebbbron
5. Coordinating Instructions
- i. Turn in supporting annexes NLT 17 May, 2011
 - ii. When directed, task organize to support the main effort in Hebbbron
 - 1. Develop cross functional teams in support of the main effort
 - iii. Use Hebbbron Community Center as base of operations
 - iv. Identify key individuals within Hebbbron population who can assist in influencing/shaping effort
 - v. Determine initial logistics requirements NLT 1 June, 2011
 - vi. Determine initial timeline NLT 1 June, 2011
 - vii. Complete Final Implementation Plan NLT 15 June, 2011
 - viii. When directed, execute Phase 1 of Implementation Plan (Hebbbron Heights) during summer, 2011

CONCLUSION

The Salinas planners clearly grasp many of the lessons learned from recent US efforts in Iraq, Afghanistan the Philippines and Latin America as presented by NPS Advisors. There will be many challenges ahead including the task of reorganizing current force structure in support of massing capabilities by phase in one area of Salinas at a time. Developing the communications architecture that can be leveraged by all key players in passing relevant information in a timely manner will be a critical component of the strategy as will fusing intelligence with operations. Most importantly, Salinas must find a way to connect with its population in order to eventually achieve the goal of community self-policing. To be sure, Salinas has much more to do and the challenges to some may seem insurmountable. However, once planners have concluded detailed planning, move to the execution phase and eventually demonstrate success with their strategic plan, there is a strong possibility other smaller cities will want to emulate their success and this model can contribute at the national level.

Endnotes:

ⁱ Karl Vick, “Iraq’s Lessons on the Home Front”, *Washington Post*, November 15, 2009.

ⁱⁱ Jason A. Clarke and Tracy L. Onufur, *Understanding Environmental Factors that Affect Violence in Salinas, CA*, Thesis, (Naval Post Graduate School, CA December, 2009) 17. Electronic Access: http://edocs.nps.edu/npspubs/scholarly/theses/2009/Dec/09Dec%5FClarke_J.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Rebecca Lorentz, Counter Gang Strategy Advisor, Naval Post Graduate School, interview by author, Monterey, CA, 18 January, 2011.

^{iv} Meeting at City Hall, Salinas, California, April 19, 2011. *Intra-agency Strategic Implementation Planning Meeting*.

^v Rebecca Lorentz, Interview with Salinas Police Department Analyst Karen Ivy, April 12, 2011.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Vick, Iraq's Lessons on the Home Front".

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Robin Urevich, "Gang Busters", *Monterey County Weekly*, October 7, 2010.

^x Zachary Stahl, "Gangland Security, Naval Post Graduate School to Advise Salinas on Fighting Gangs", *Monterey, County Weekly*, February 2, 2009.

^{xi} Ibid

^{xii} Meeting at City Hall, Salinas, California, April 19, 2011.

^{xiii} Ibid

^{xiv} Ibid

^{xv} Ibid

^{xvi} Ibid

^{xvii} Ibid

^{xviii} Ibid

^{xix} Ibid

^{xx} Laurence H. Arnold, Christopher O'Gwin, and Jeremy S. Vickers, Small town insurgency: the struggle for information dominance to reduce gang violence, Thesis, (Naval Postgraduate School, CA December 2010) 174. Electronic Access: <http://edocs.nps.edu/npspubs/scholarly/theses/2010/Dec/10Dec%5FArnold.pdf>