

The War Next Door: DoD's Role in Combating Mexican TCOs

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Abstract

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The Government of Mexico is waging an historic campaign against the Drug Trafficking Organizations. The conflict is a mosaic of several wars occurring at once. The cartels are battling for control of territory to expand market share; protect operations; expand into the United States. Secretary of State Clinton referred to the drug war in Mexico as an insurgency. If Mexico continues to follow this path of destruction, it could become a failed state creating security challenges for the US. Our national security documents state that these Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO) pose a significant threat to U.S. National Security, with dire implications for public safety, public health, democratic institutions, and economic stability. This paper frames the problem examining the threat to our National Security; describes the operational environment by looking at U.S. and Mexican strategies and the Department of Defense's (DoD) current role; and recommends DoD develop three operational approaches of cooperation, containment, and interdiction that supports the U.S. whole-of-government effort to combat the Mexican TCOs.

The War Next Door: DoD's Role in Combating Mexican TCOs

The Government of Mexico is waging an historic campaign against the Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs). The conflict in Mexico is a mosaic of several wars occurring at once.¹ The cartels are battling for control of territory to expand their market share; fighting against the Mexican Government to protect their operations; waging war against the Mexican people; and confronting U.S. and Mexican Law Enforcement Agencies to expand their operations into the United States.² Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has referred to the drug war in Mexico as an insurgency.³ If Mexico continues to follow this path of destruction, it could potentially become a failed state and create significant security challenges for the United States. The U.S. must actively engage with Mexico to prevent the situation from deteriorating and threatening our National Security.

The violence from the drug war has threatened citizen security and has disrupted governmental rule of law on every level within the Mexican States. These catastrophic events have amplified the U.S. Government's concerns about Mexico's stability and the potential spillover effects into the United States. According to published estimates, the drug war has resulted in over 60,000 deaths in Mexico between 2006 and 2011.⁴ Additionally, an estimated 40,000 Americans die each year due to drugs provided by the Mexican DTOs. In contrast, the war in Afghanistan during the same time period resulted in 2,156 U.S. soldiers killed in action, with an additional 1,059 coalition and 11,864 civilian deaths.⁵ However, violence is not the only concern. The drug war is extremely complex and linked with multiple social and cultural problems, further complicating U.S. policy issues ranging from border security, counterterrorism, gun control, and immigration.

The traditional threat broadly understood as the illicit movement of drugs and human trafficking has undergone a metamorphosis. U.S. and Mexican officials now refer to the DTOs as Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) due to their expanded hybrid activities of human trafficking and alien smuggling; weapons trafficking; money laundering; bulk cash smuggling; intellectual property theft; organized retail theft; extortion; kidnapping; and links to U.S. gangs and foreign terrorist organizations.⁶ The diversification of criminal network activities has resulted in a convergence of transnational threats that has evolved into a complex and powerful movement significantly destabilizing to governance south of the border.

Our national security documents state that these TCOs pose a significant and growing threat to U.S. national security, with dire implications for public safety, public health, democratic institutions, and economic stability.⁷ The President, in his 2011 Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime: Addressing Converging Threats to National Security, called for a whole-of-government approach in concert with our international partners to counter this threat.

The Merida Initiative is a cooperative strategy between the U.S. and Mexico that employs all the elements of national power aimed at dismantling the TCOs. Although U.S. and Mexican efforts to combat the TCOs have intensified under this agreement, the problem is far from being resolved or stable, forcing members of the U.S. Congress to call for an increased role of the U.S. military.⁸ This is exactly the right approach because regardless of all the liabilities of security, containment and interdiction focused efforts, our experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown, economic development, social and political reform cannot occur in a context of violent anarchy. DoD must take

on a more direct role in countering the growing National Security threat south of the border with Mexico, and at least Half-Pivot to the Americas⁹ to support the whole-of-government strategy to Combat TCOs.

This paper frames the problem by examining the threat that Mexican TCOs pose to our National Security; describes the operational environment by looking at U.S. and Mexican strategies and DoDs current role; and recommends DoD develop three operational approaches of cooperation, containment, and interdiction that supports the U.S. whole-of-government effort to combat the Mexican TCOs.

TCOs a Clear and Present Threat

Mexican TCOs pose a significant and growing threat to U.S. national security, with dire implications for public safety, public health, democratic institutions, and economic stability.¹⁰ The TCOs have expanded their presence, sophistication, and significance; and now threaten many aspects of how Americans live, work, and do business. These organizations promote corruption, violence, and other illegal activities that jeopardize our border security, and causes human misery. Transnational criminal activity reduces a state's ability to maintain control of what goes on within its territory, diminishes its sovereignty, and undermines its domestic laws. TCOs challenge national governance to maintain freedom of operation and promote socioeconomic decay and turmoil.

The security and stability of Mexico is vital to U.S. National Interest. On a day-to-day basis, no other country affects the U.S. as much as Mexico due to our deep interdependence. There is more than \$300 billion annually in cross-border trade, tens of millions of U.S. and Mexican citizens in bi-national families, and everyday interactions

of more than 14 million people living along the nearly two-thousand-mile shared border.¹¹

The 2009 National Drug Threat Assessment characterized the Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) as representing the “greatest organized crime threat” to the United States.¹² Mexico is a major producer and supplier of heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana and the transit country for more than 90% of the cocaine sold in the United States.¹³ Mexican TCOs dominate the U.S. illicit drug market and control the supply pipelines and corridors into the U.S., which regularly cross the Southwest Border thousands of times each day with near impunity with billions of dollars in clandestine products.¹⁴ TCO control over these illicit corridors makes the U.S. border vulnerable to exploitation by secondary criminal or terrorist organizations.

The demand for illicit drugs, and the revenue it produces, fuels the power, immunity, and violence of the criminal organizations. Mexican TCOs are escalating violence to expand their market share within the Western Hemisphere, protect their operations within Mexico, and extend their reach into the United States. Additionally, they have broadened their operations beyond drug trafficking to other nefarious activities, including links to terrorist organizations, which threatens the governance of Mexico and U.S. national security.

Mexican TCOs and associates dominate the supply and wholesale distribution of most illicit drugs in the United States.¹⁵ These organizations control much of the production, transportation, and wholesale distribution of illicit drugs destined for and in the United States. The U.S. drug market is highly lucrative with estimates showing that Mexican drug sales generate up to \$48 billion a year in revenue.¹⁶ This profit potential

makes for a highly attractive market, fueling expansion and competition. Currently, seven Mexican based TCOs are in a dynamic struggle for control of the lucrative smuggling corridors leading into the United States; these include the Sinaloa Cartel, Los Zetas, Gulf Cartel, Juárez Cartel, Beltran Leyva Organization (BLO), La Familia Michoacan (LFM), and Tijuana Cartel.¹⁷ This has resulted in unprecedented levels of violence in Mexico and along U.S. Southwest Border.

Mexican cartels advance their operations, in part, by corrupting or intimidating law enforcement officials. The cartels seek impunity from government interference to protect their operations and maintain their freedom of maneuver. Often, the Mexican municipal, state, and federal government officials, along with the police forces, work together with the cartels in an organized network of corruption. A Pax Mafioso, is a specific example of corruption which guarantees a politician votes and a following in exchange for turning a 'blind eye' towards a particular cartel.¹⁸ When corruption and intimidation fail, the DTOs often resort to violence. The DTOs have slaughtered hundreds of policemen, and now increasingly target politicians. Part of the strategy used by the criminal groups behind the killings of local figures is to weaken the local governments. The extreme violence puts politicians at the mercy of the DTOs, thereby allowing control of the fundamental government structures and expanding their criminal agendas. This inability of the local and Mexican governments to lessen and prevent the violence or dismantle the DTOs erodes the people's confidence and trust. While the most direct effect of the DTO actions are felt locally, the impact has created a climate of growing instability in the national government.

Violence is an intrinsic feature in the trade of illicit drugs and is used by traffickers to settle disputes. A credible threat of violence maintains employee discipline and a semblance of order with suppliers, creditors, and buyers. However, violence now associated with drug trafficking organizations in Mexico is on an entirely different scale. The bloodletting is not only associated with resolving disputes or maintaining discipline, but also is now directed toward government officials, the news media, and the local populace. The brutality has been graphically dramatized by beheadings, public hanging of corpses, killing of innocent bystanders, car bombs, torture, and public assassinations.¹⁹

The Mexican government's attempt to dismantle and pressure the DTOs sparked an unparalleled level of violence across the country, as the DTOs fiercely fought back. The government's plan to target the cartel leadership, in the so called "kingpin strategy", has proven unsuccessful in stemming the violence and dismantling the cartels. Although the Mexican government has succeeded in removing or killing 22 of the top 37 most wanted drug traffickers, violence has continued to escalate.²⁰ The DTOs have demonstrated an unanticipated resilience as their leadership is arrested or killed. Removal of these high value targets has often lead to the transfer of power to new and more violent leaders which changes the dynamics of the organization. An additional complexity has been the fragmentation of some of the DTOs, as they adapt and transform to a more decentralized and networked model with independent cell structures that make it harder for Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) to dismantle.²¹

The Mexican drug cartels have continued to grow in both power and influence, and to expand their reach into the United States. Far from being a south of the border

problem alone, at least 1000 U.S. cities have reported the presence of Mexican cartels, and they're looking to spread their tentacles wider.²² The cartels are increasing their connection with gangs to gain greater control over the retail drug market. The gangs' proficiency ensures that the drugs remain readily available in the U.S. market.

The threat of transnational terrorist infiltration through U.S. borders remains a critical concern. The U.S. Border Patrol regularly apprehends Aliens from 35 Special Interest Countries (SIC) with known ties to terrorist organizations.²³ From fiscal years 2006 to 2011, there were 1,918 apprehensions at our Southwest Border.²⁴ In 2010 alone, CBP apprehended 663 illegal aliens from SICs with known terrorisms ties.²⁵ These countries included Iran, Syria, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan and Yemen. Admittedly, not all Special Interest Aliens (SIAs) are terrorists and it is difficult to quantify the true threat that terrorists pose to U.S. borders. Nevertheless, indicators of the threat are clear. For instance, members of Hezbollah, the Lebanon-based terrorist organization, have already entered the United States by way of the Southwest Border.²⁶ In 2002, authorities arrested Salim Mucharrafile, a café owner in Tijuana, Mexico, for smuggling more than 200 Lebanese people into the United States, including several believed to have ties to Hezbollah.²⁷ Also, in January 2011, Border Patrol agents apprehended Said Jaziri while he was being smuggling across the Southwest Border in the truck of a car.²⁸ Jaziri is linked to radical Islam, and called for the death of Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard over depictions of the prophet Mohammed.²⁹

The increasing importance of the Southwest Border to terrorist organizations poses a significant threat to U.S. national security. The cartels are now routinely

coming in very close contact with the likes of Hezbollah, Hamas, and Al Qaeda who are vying for access to the Mexican TCO territory and money.³⁰ The Quds Force, an elite arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guard with connections to terrorism, attempted to hire a hit man from the Los Zeta cartel, in October 2011, to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in the United States.³¹ Had this attack been successful, Quds Force intended to use Los Zetas for other attacks in the future. In December 2011, U.S. officials charged Ayman Jouman, a Hezbollah financier, of smuggling tons of U.S.-bound cocaine and laundering hundreds of millions of dollars with the Los Zeta Cartel.³² Terrorist know they do not need a visa to illegally cross the Southwest Border. They also know that there are well established criminal networks in Mexico that are very successful at smuggling humans and weapons into the United States.

The hybrid and complex nature of the threat from the TCOs clearly poses an imminent danger to the security of both the U.S. and Mexico. A combined comprehensive strategic and targeted approach is required to combat this threat, in which DoD must be actively involved. Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere, Roberta Jacobson, stated in testimony before congress "There clearly is a role for the U.S. military to support a whole-of-government effort to combat Mexican TCOs."³³

Evolution of U.S.-Mexican Efforts to Combat TCO

Security collaboration between the United States and Mexico has traditionally suffered from asymmetrical capabilities, divergent priorities, and frequent distrust. Mexicans tend to see their current plight as being caused by the U.S. insatiable appetite for drugs and export of guns that fuels the power and violence of the cartels. From a U.S. point of view, Mexico's institutional weakness and corruption are the source of its

woes and the primary obstacle to more effective cooperation. Mexico's current crisis therefore presents an unprecedented opportunity for the two countries to work together to address shared challenges and responsibilities.

In 2006 a dynamic shift occurred in U.S.-Mexican relations. Mexican President Calderon made several decisions that helped set the foundation for the currently positive U.S.-Mexico defense relationship that included: placing the military in the lead to combat TCOs; and publishing a national directive dictating greater cooperation with Mexico's neighbors on matters of mutual interest.³⁴ This mandate gradually pushed the Mexican military to work more closely with the United States, and placed both militaries in a position to focus on a common threat on both sides of the border.

President Calderon made combating drug trafficking and organized crime a top priority of his administration. His strategy focused on: (1) carrying out joint police-military operations to dismantle the cartels; (2) increasing the operational and technological capacities of the state; (3) initiating legal and institutional reforms; (4) strengthening the crime prevention and social programs; and (5) strengthening international cooperation.³⁵ Additionally, he reached out and sought U.S. assistance in the development of a cooperative effort to jointly acknowledge the role of both countries in solving the problems of the cartels.

In October 2007, meetings between the United States and Mexican administrations resulted in a new package of U.S. assistance for Mexico and Central America that would provide \$1.4 billion beginning in FY2008 and last through FY2010.³⁶ Titled the Merida Initiative, it became the basis of U.S.-Mexican security cooperation, and the U.S. strategy to combat Mexican DTOs. The Mérida Initiative, as it was

originally conceived, sought to (1) break the power and impunity of criminal organizations; (2) strengthen border, air, and maritime controls; (3) improve the capacity of justice systems in the region; and (4) curtail gang activity and diminish local drug demand.³⁷ The funding assistance was initially focused on training and equipping military and law enforcement officials engaged in counterdrug efforts, improving border security, and reforming Mexico's police and judicial institutions.³⁸ The U.S. for their part promised to focus efforts on demand reduction and illicit gun trafficking south into Mexico. The Merida Initiative served as a catalyst for expanded U.S.-Mexican military relations. DoD's role expanded as the administering agent to deliver equipment to Mexico, and conduct training to build capacity and capability of Mexican military and security forces to allow them to aggressively combat and dismantle the DTOs.

Increasing the complexity of the threat is the potential of a crime-terror nexus. In 2010, the U.S. started to recognize the convergence of various criminal activities with the DTOs. These new hybrid organizations are not contained regionally but are transnational in nature and pose a significant threat to the United States interests and national security. The threat of transnational criminal organizations first appeared in the 2010 National Security Strategy that states: combating transnational crime is a top priority; warns about its threat to governance and the emerging crime-terror nexus; and calls for a multi dimensional whole-of-government approach to counter these threats.³⁹

In response to these hybrid organizations, President Obama directed a broad review of steps the military and intelligence community could take to help combat this threat in cooperation with Mexico. As part of the review, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) worked with USNORTHCOM to identify the most useful military

surveillance technology for monitoring land, sea and air traffic along the border.⁴⁰ This included the deployment of ground-based radar systems on the Southwest Border; and agreements with Mexico to fly Global Hawk UAVs into Mexico to conduct surveillance.⁴¹ Additionally, in 2011 the President released his Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime: Addressing Converging Threats to National Security. The elements of this new strategy flow from a single unifying principle: “we will build, balance, and integrate all the tools of American power to combat TOC and related threats to national security and urge our foreign partners to do the same.”⁴² The strategy recognizes TCOs as a significant threat to national security and emphasizes U.S. planning, priorities, and activities accordingly.⁴³ The key areas of this strategy where DoD plays a role are in enhancing intelligence and information sharing; strengthening detection, interdiction, and disruption of drug trafficking and other transnational threats; protection of Americans and our partners from the harm, violence, and exploitation of TCOs; and building Mexican capacity and capability.⁴⁴

President Calderon met with President Obama and both publicly “pledged to continue working together to combat the TCOs that threaten both countries.”⁴⁵ Further negotiations led to a new strategy, the Beyond Merida Initiative. The new strategy shifts funding away from purchasing equipment to building Mexican institutions and disrupting the organizational capacity of the TCOs. It is built around four pillars: disrupt organized criminal groups; strengthen institutions; build a 21st Century border; and build strong and resilient communities.

The path forward to combat TCOs, and future U.S.-Mexican relations, now depends upon the policy choices of the new Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto and

President Obama. In speaking with President Obama, the Mexican leader pledged continued cooperation with the U.S. in combating TCOs. He stated that “Mexico will continue to mount a real fight against drug trafficking on a united front and there would be no truce or deals made with the drug cartels”.⁴⁶ The security policy of President Nieto prioritizes the reduction of violence, kidnappings, and extortion; fixing Mexico’s justice system; and domestic economic development; and targeted strikes at the DTO instead of fighting them head-on.⁴⁷ Additionally, he wants to expand Mexico’s drug war partnership and supports hosting U.S. military training on Mexican soil on U.S. counterinsurgency tactics learned in Iraq and Afghanistan. He also approved continued flights of U.S. surveillance drones in Mexico to gather information on drug trafficking.

A window of opportunity now exists to shape the conditions for a future U.S.-Mexican strategic approach that continues to build commitment and cooperation between the two nations; controls or contains the problem to protect society without closing economies; builds institutions, reduces violence, and conducts social reform; while disrupting the organizational capacity of the TCOs, interdicts supply, and targets key leaders to dismantle the TCOs. DoD must remain a vital component in supporting this combined whole-of-government effort.

DoD’s Role in U.S. Strategies

DoD implements policy and guidance laid out in National Strategies. The body of National Security documents highlights the threat of TCOs and DoD’s role; however, nothing outlines how DoD will accomplish these missions in a whole-of-government effort to combat TOC.

The 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) serves as the capstone document to the other U.S. national level strategies. It delineates TCOs as an advancing threat to

national security, explains the unique relationship the US has with Mexico due to the shared border and highlights the requirement the US has to enable Mexico to counter the current threat.⁴⁸ The NSS designates combating transnational crime as a top priority, warns about threats to governance and the emerging crime-terror nexus and calls for a multi dimensional whole-of-government approach to counter these threats.⁴⁹

The 2011 National Military Strategy (NMS) expands on the NSS objectives and provides very broad guidance for combating Mexican TCOs. The NMS states that the U.S. will look to build an increasingly close security partnership with Mexico; and as part of our shared responsibility to ensure security on both sides of the border, the U.S. shall assist Mexican security forces in combating violent transnational criminal organizations.⁵⁰ The NMS affirms that DoD will defend the homeland and play a critical role in supporting homeland security; and partner with DHS, particularly the Coast Guard, to improve air, maritime, and land domain awareness to help secure the approaches to the nation.⁵¹ It further states that DoD will continue to dedicate, fund, and train a portion of the National Guard for homeland defense and Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA).⁵²

The strategies contained in the NSS and MMS must be translated into action. In order to accomplish this, I recommend the development of cooperation, containment and interdiction as three operational approaches that are vital to the success of the whole of government effort to combat Transnational Organized Crime (TOC).

Cooperation

Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) is one of the most important tools available in attaining national security objectives. The purpose of TSC is to reinforce the GCC's mission to deter aggression by strengthening ties and interoperability with friendly

military forces with respect to their sovereignty, support regional stability and U.S. values, and show U.S. resolve in supporting our allies and partners.

The U.S.-Mexican defense relationship has evolved into a visible bellwether for the level of the two nations' commitment and joint efforts.⁵³ DoD military-to-military relationship with Mexico is growing stronger, with full respect for Mexican sovereignty and a shared responsibility for countering the TCO activity on both sides of the border. The Merida Initiative has served as the basis for U.S. and Mexico security cooperation and as the catalyst for improved mil-mil relationships. USNORTHCOM leads DoD's Theater Security Cooperation efforts by building partnership activities with Mexico to promote specific U.S. security interests and support the development of Mexican military capabilities for self-defense and coordinated operations. As the administering agent for the Mérida Initiative, USNORTHCOM delivered over \$415.5 million of equipment to improve the Mexican military's ability to deploy rapid-reaction forces against TCOs, and to conduct maritime surveillance to deny the use of the eastern Pacific and western Caribbean to transnational criminal organizations and potential terrorists.⁵⁴ DoD's engagement has gone beyond providing hardware and the associated training; it also has focused on developing the ability to analyze and share information that will allow the Mexican military to conduct operations against the TCOs to systematically dismantle them. USNORTHCOM assisted in the establishment of an intelligence fusion center in Northern Mexico, which led to the intelligence driven operations and apprehension of 22 of the top 37 most wanted drug traffickers. USNORTHCOM has aggressively pursued interagency and partner-nation cooperation for Maritime Domain Awareness.⁵⁵ It has partnered with Mexico to better integrate

regional efforts by initiating the development of an automated identification system architecture, which will contribute to increased information exchange and Maritime Domain Awareness. This will have a positive impact on our combined capability to combat illicit traffic.⁵⁶

Although US-Mexican relations are at an all time high, the relationship is still not mature, stable, or consolidated. The U.S. must continue to demonstrate its commitment as a dedicated partner with Mexico to combat TCOs with the same or greater levels of effort, and look for ways to solidify and expand on the gains made through present TSC operations. DoD must continue engagement with Mexico to improve cooperation in combating TCOs by:

- Institutionalize existing U.S.-Mexican relations and organizational arrangements.
- Increase information and intelligence sharing.
- Expand training exercises with Mexico.
- Continue senior official visits, counterpart visits, conferences, and staff talks.
- Develop a personnel and unit exchange program.
- Continue efforts to enhance security along Mexico's southern border region.
- Share counterinsurgency lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Help establish interagency networks to target TCOs.
- Provide training assistance and help establish National Police Force.

A long term and loftier goal would be to invite Mexico to join NORAD in a tri-national command (Mexico, U.S., and Canada), or establish a separate bi-national command in Mexico. Extending participation to Mexico in NORAD would augment air

and sea domain awareness in North America, increase security within the Western Hemisphere, and buttress continuing U.S.–Mexican cooperation. This institution could focus on joint national security issues other than TCO such as disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, pandemic influenza, response to terrorism, and the proliferation of WMD.

TSC activities are reaping the expected rewards of improved relationships with Mexico. DoD must continue to strengthen mil-mil relations; build partner capacity; institutionalize organizational arrangements; and synchronize efforts with other federal agencies in a whole of government approach to combat TCOs. Expanding cooperation with Mexico will not only enhance our efforts to combat TCOs, but also the improved positive relationships will have benefits for wider Western Hemisphere security.

Containment

Containment includes actions aimed at negating the real or potential harm posed by Mexican TCOs, and preventing the spillover effects into the United States. While only in extraordinary circumstances would DoD take the lead to secure our borders, TCOs pose a serious danger to the Nation and requires the combined efforts of LEAs, intelligence agencies, and support from DoD assets to enhance LEA efforts to secure the U.S. and Mexican border and combat TCOs.

The containment operational approach focuses on gaining control of the ground, air and maritime domains of the border through the augmentation of LEAs detection, monitoring, and interdiction efforts by providing DoD unique capabilities. In order to achieve this, the U.S. Government (USG) must expand DoD's proven success in supporting LEAs by: first, enhancing unity of effort by strengthening the operational command structure and assigning forces to this vital mission; and second increasing the

viability of support request by lifting DoD imposed restrictions on the use of title10 forces to support this mission.

To effectively contain the threat of TCOs in the Southwest Border region, the U.S. must exploit the synergies among the many agencies within homeland security, law enforcement, and DoD; as well as deepen strategic alliances with Mexico to gain operational control of both sides of the border. This requires formalizing relationships, synchronizing operations, and improving unity of effort thorough the establishment of a Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF).

Joint Task Force North (JTF-N), which serves as USNORTHCOM's operational headquarters and tasked by DoD as the lead organization to provide support to LEAs, should be used as the base for this new command structure.⁵⁷ The JIATF-N structure should be designed around the JIATF-S template and have permanent assigned representatives from all the federal agencies: as well as State and local LEAs; and LNOs from the National Guard Bureau and the Southwest Border States Regional Task Forces. In addition, DoD and the Department of State should work with Mexico for the permanent assignment of LNOs from the Mexican Navy (SEMAR) and Army (SEDENA). The creation of a JIATF would facilitate comprehensive campaign planning, effectively integrate DoD support, minimize duplication of effort, increase interagency cooperation and coordination, achieve greater intelligence fusion and information sharing, encourage multinational partnering, and synchronize the execution of missions.

Recent history shows there are many benefits from DoD's role to help secure the Southwest Border, including augmenting CBP and strengthening military- to- military relationships with Mexico. DHS specifically highlights the effectiveness of two National

Guard missions, Operation Jump Start and Operation Phalanx, and their significant impact on CBP operations and border security. During these operations Presidents Bush and Obama issued executive orders, under the authority of Title 32, section 502(f) of the U.S. Code, to deploy National Guard Units in support of CBP on the Southwest Border.⁵⁸

President Bush authorized the deployment of 6,000 National Guard soldiers and airmen from all 50 states to support Operation Jump Start between June 2006 and July 2008. National Guard units provided logistical and administrative support; operated detection systems; provided mobile communications; augmented border-related intelligence analysis efforts; and built and installed border security infrastructure.⁵⁹ Operation Jump Start resulted in 186,814 undocumented aliens being apprehended, as well as 1,100 vehicles and more than 321,000 pounds of marijuana and cocaine seized.⁶⁰

Operation Phalanx began under executive order from President Obama and ran from 2010-2011. It authorized the deployment of 1,700 National Guardsmen from the four Southwest Border States. The operation provided ground surveillance, aerial reconnaissance, criminal investigative analysis, mobile communications, transportation, logistics, and training support. The National Guard helped with the seizure of more than 56,342 pounds of drugs, the apprehension of more than 17,887 undocumented aliens, and the confiscation of millions of dollars in illicit currency.⁶¹

While the track record of DoD's support to LEA is a proven success, there is a need for more consistent and dedicated support to effectively contain the threat of TCOs and gain control of the Southwest Border. The lack of dedicated DoD assets,

coupled with the current support request procedures and out of date restrictive legislation, inhibits the effective integration of DoD assets and limits the duration of support missions.

Customs and Border Protection noted that the temporary nature of National Guard duty at the border impacts long term border security planning.⁶² It is difficult to incorporate the National Guard into a strategic border security plan, given the variety and number of missions that the National Guard is responsible for.⁶³ Additionally, the uncertainty of the availability of Title 10 volunteer forces precludes deliberate operational planning. DHS officials feel that DoD's border assistance is ad hoc due to DoD's other operational requirements, resource availability, and legal constraints for mission approval.⁶⁴ This lack of predictability and availability of DoD resources to support LEA CD and Combating TOC operations significantly affects synchronized planning and unity of effort. In order to improve the efficiency and predictability of support in the containment strategy, I recommend DoD establish four regional task forces; augment the Border Patrol with the National Guard; amend the National Defense Authorization Act; and modify the process for requesting title 10 support.

DoD should establish four National Guard Regional Task Forces (RTFs) along the Southwest Border (RTF-California, Arizona, New Mexico, and RTF-Texas). The assets and personnel from the 50 state counterdrug task forces should be re-assigned to four regional task forces as forces for employment. Also, President Obama should issue another executive order, under Title 32 section 502(f), authorizing the deployment of an additional 4,000 National Guardsmen from across the country to augment these task forces and provide permanent support to the LEAs in securing the border and

combating TCOs. This mission should continue until it has achieved the strategic objective specified in the President's Strategy to Combat TOC, "of dismantling TCOs to where they are no longer a threat to our national security and can be effectively managed by local law enforcement agencies".⁶⁵

The use of the National Guard to augment the Border Patrol is a viable, economic and appropriate solution. The total estimated cost of three years for Operations Jump Start and Phalanx was \$1.35 billion.⁶⁶ This may seem extravagant until you compare it to the \$10 billion a month we currently spend in Afghanistan.⁶⁷ The \$136 million budgeted for annual National Guard State Counterdrug (CD) plans could be used to offset the cost of activation.⁶⁸ Additionally, the Office of National Drug Control Policy could reallocate a portion of the \$653 million slated for drug interdiction efforts in Afghanistan to fund the mission.⁶⁹

The second recommended solution involves changing the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to embolden support to LEAs. Removing the DoD restrictions for the employment of Title 10 DoD assets in support of LEAs will improve efficiency and provide predictability to LEA for planning. Under current legislation DoD support to LEA activities is limited. Section 1004 of the NDAA and Title 10 of the U.S. Code (Section 124) authorize the types of support DoD can provide for counterdrug operations.⁷⁰ In addition, DoD places further restrictions on the approval of Title 10 forces to provide operational support to LEAs. Given these restrictions and complexities it can take up to 180 days to obtain final approval from the Office of the Secretary of Defense to execute a mission.⁷¹ Additionally, DoD further constrains JTF-N support to LEAs by solely using voluntary military forces. DoD's current operational tempo has

significantly impacted the availability of units for JTF-N to solicit for support missions. This coupled with JTF-N's limited \$10 million dollar a year budget has made it very difficult to fulfill LEA requests at any given time. On average, JTF-N only provides support for 20% of the requests for assistance received each year.⁷²

Improving the mission assignment process will greatly enhance DoD support to LEAs. JTF-N, through USNORTHCOM, should be allowed to submit request for forces to meet operational capability needs to support their campaign objectives. In addition, DoD and the Joint Staff should elevate the priority of fill for these requests and ensure units and assets are tasked to fulfill these mission requirements. The dedicated assets from the National Guard augmented with Title 10 capabilities will provide more effective and efficient support to LEAs in a timely manner; allow detailed planning for employment; and ensure a synchronized effort to combat TCOs.

Homeland security relies on a unified effort to maintain effective control of our borders; synchronize operations; and disrupt and dismantle TCOs.⁷³ Securing U.S. borders is critical to containing the threat TCOs pose to our national security. Increased DoD support is a proven solution that enhances LEA capabilities, creates a safer and more secure environment, and contributes to the broader Counter-TCO fight. The USG must expand DoD's support to LEAs, strengthen the operational command structure, and assigning forces to this vital mission.

Interdiction

Joint Publication 1-02 defines interdiction as "a continuum of events focused on interrupting illegal drugs smuggled by air, sea, or land. It normally consists of several phases such as cueing, detection, monitoring, interception, handover, disruption, and apprehension, some which may occur simultaneously".⁷⁴ The Department of Defense's

role in combating illicit drug trafficking is clearly spelled out in statute. It is tasked as the lead federal agency for the detection and monitoring (D&M) of aerial and maritime trafficking of illegal drugs into the United States.⁷⁵ Interdiction is a vital component of the whole of government approach to dismantle TCOs, and DoD must not only continue to support this but also intensify their efforts. In order for interdiction to be successful it should be combined with other efforts to dismantle the TCOs, and DoD must provide the necessary focus and assets to support the interdiction effort.

JIATF-South, under the U.S. Southern Command, is the primary operations center and coordinator for detecting, monitoring, and interdicting suspect air and maritime drug trafficking events in the transit zone.⁷⁶ The transit zone is a seven million square-mile area, roughly twice the size of the continental United States, and includes the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and the eastern Pacific Ocean.⁷⁷

Since 2005 DoD has been providing fewer assets to the interdiction effort. The Navy reduced its available ship days and on-station flight hours support to JIATF-South due to competing national security requirements, primarily to support Afghanistan and Iraq.⁷⁸ The reduced availability of the U.S. Navy P-3 maritime patrol aircraft has degraded JIATF-South's ability to detect maritime movements.⁷⁹ With the assets available, JIATF- South reports that it detected less than one- third of the known maritime drug shipments.⁸⁰

In addition to the reduced DoD assets, the readiness rates of older Coast Guard ships, which support interdiction operations in the transit zone, have declined significantly.⁸¹ According to JIATF-South officials, they cannot interdict many of the

maritime events in the western Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific Ocean because it cannot get ships or aircraft to the suspected movement in time.⁸²

While DoD support for the interdiction effort has reduced, the number of “known actionable” maritime smuggling events in the western Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific Ocean has more than doubled.⁸³ It is time for DoD to rebalance their support efforts, and at least “Half-Pivot to the Americas” to counter this threat.⁸⁴ The failure to do so will result in the continued metastasis of the TCO operations. In pursuing the Half-Pivot to the Americas strategy, DoD must take the following actions to enhance interdiction efforts by:

- Dedicating ship assets to JITAF-South to increase interdiction capability.
- Redeploying AWACS to support the aerial interdiction program.
- Augmenting the Navy P-3s with other DoD aircraft.
- Extending the time aircraft and ships are deployed to the region.
- Upgrading the sensors on existing aircraft to improve their capabilities.
- Deploying aircraft to locations closer to the suspected trafficking routes.

In addition to providing an increase in resources to interdict the flow of illicit trafficking, DoD must recognize the global impact of the drug trade and the need for a holistic approach to counter the threat. DoD should direct USNORTHCOM as the lead for the development of a Global Synchronization Plan for Combating TOC; in the similar method as their development of the Global Synchronization plan for Pandemic Influenza. This plan should designate supporting and supported command relationships; delineate GCC tasks for counterdrug interdiction operations and

combating TOC; and be fully integrated with the interagency, intergovernmental, and our multi-national partners efforts.

While interdiction is not a panacea, if practiced successfully it can keep the cartels off-balance by disrupting their operations and raising the costs of doing business. TCOs pose a significant threat to hemispheric security and citizen safety. The current unstable conditions and ongoing violence in Mexico, is the result of the TCO efforts to control the highly lucrative trade of drugs and other illicit products. A comprehensive whole of government approach is required to address this threat. DoD must play a prominent role in supporting the transit zone interdiction effort. Preventing illicit cargo from reaching the shores of our hemispheric partners reduces the threat and will help stabilize their security and social systems, and ultimately our own as well.

Conclusion

Mexican TCOs pose a clear threat to U.S. interest and National Security with dire implications for public safety, public health, democratic institutions, and economic stability.⁸⁵ The traditional threat broadly understood as the illicit movement of drugs and human trafficking has undergone a metamorphosis. TCOs have expanded their activities to include weapons trafficking; money laundering; bulk cash smuggling; intellectual property theft; organized retail theft; extortion; kidnapping; and links to U.S. gangs and foreign terrorist organizations.⁸⁶ The diversification of these criminal networks and the convergence of transnational threats that has evolved to become more complex and destabilizing to governance, and requires a combined whole-of-government approach to combat them.

It is time DoD reassess its role and rebalances its support efforts in at least a “Half-Pivot to the Americas” to counter this threat in a whole of government approach.

As part of this reassessment, I recommend the development of cooperation, containment and interdiction as three operational approaches that are vital to the success of the whole-of-government effort to combat the Mexican TCOs.

Theater Security Cooperation activities are reaping the expected rewards of improved relationships with Mexico. DoD must continue to strengthen mil-mil relations; build partner capacity; institutionalize organizational arrangements; and synchronize efforts with other federal agencies in a whole-of-government approach to combat TCOs.

Gaining control of the U.S. Southwest Border and containing the threat from the TCOs is critical to protecting our society and ensuring our national security. DoD support is a proven solution that enhances LEA capabilities, creates a safer and more secure environment, and contributes to the broader Counter-TCO fight. The USG must expand DoD's support to LEAs, strengthen the operational command structure, and assigning forces to this vital mission.

Interdiction if practiced successfully can keep the cartels off-balance by disrupting their operations and raising the costs of doing business. DoD must play a prominent role in supporting the transit zone interdiction effort. Preventing illicit cargo from reaching the shores of our hemispheric partners reduces the threat and will help stabilize their security and social systems, and ultimately our own as well.

These policy approaches are by no means exhaustive, but represent a template to begin discussion of designing appropriate DoD operational support for a whole-of-government strategy to combat Mexican TCOs. However, the time to act is now before the window of opportunity with Mexico closes and while DoD can still be effectively positioned to counter this threat.

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