

Enhancing North American Security –

A Military Perspective

by Lieutenant General William B. Caldwell, IV

I applaud the efforts of the students of the Command and General Staff College Southwest Border Scholars' Seminar, and I want to thank the CGSC Foundation's Arthur D. Simons Center for Interagency Cooperation for compiling their works in this special edition of the *InterAgency Journal*, focusing on Southwest Border Security. The potential threats to the U.S. are very real, and the solutions to the problems exceed the current capability of any one federal agency and, therefore, require a whole-of-government or community approach—one that is unified in its efforts.

The President's July 25, 2011 "Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime" (TOC) states:

TOC presents sophisticated and multi-faceted threats that cannot be addressed through law enforcement action alone. Accordingly, we will establish an interagency Threat Mitigation Working Group to identify those TOC networks... The Working Group will ensure the coordination of all elements of national power to effectively protect our borders, people, economy, and financial system from the threats posed by the most dangerous and sophisticated of these transnational criminal networks.

We must develop a network to defeat a network. It cannot be solved by just looking at activities on our side of the border. Our approach to southwest border security should be seen through the lens of North American security, where we are building a viable and enduring security relationship with Mexico. The President reinforces this approach in his introduction to 2011 Strategy statement: "While this Strategy is intended to assist the United States Government in combating transnational crime, it also serves as an invitation for enhanced international cooperation."

Joint Task Force North (JTF North) and U.S. Army North's (ARNORTH) security cooperation activities with Mexico's Army allow ARNORTH to see the southwest border from both sides. This unique perspective enables ARNORTH to further enhance coordination, collaboration, and

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cooperation among those interagency partners responsible for securing the border and with the Mexican Army, which under President Calderon has carried the fight to the transnational criminal organizations (TCOs).

ARNORTH, U.S. Northern Command's (NORTHCOM) Land Component Command and Army Service Component Command,

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partners to conduct homeland defense and civil support operations and theater security cooperation activities in order to protect the American people and our way of life. ARNORTH was established on October 16, 2006 to provide a dedicated Army headquarters to the homeland. As the Land Component Command, ARNORTH has operational control of JTF North. JTF North, formerly known as Joint Task Force Six, was established on November 13, 1989 in response to President George H.W. Bush's re-dedication to the "war on drugs." JTF North's mission is to support drug law enforcement agencies (DLEA) in the conduct of counterdrug/counter narco-terrorism operations to disrupt TCOs and deter their freedom of action in order to protect the homeland. TCOs include drug trafficking organizations (DTO), alien smuggling organizations, and foreign terrorist organizations (FTO); however, JTF North's support missions are required by policy to have a counterdrug nexus.

Environment

So what has changed in the past six years that has brought more attention to the southwest border? Since 1989 the U.S. has rededicated military support to DLEA with activities to

reduce demand within our country and the global supply of illicit drugs entering our country. Some would even say we were too successful in the 1980s, the so called "Miami Vice" era, as we focused our efforts on supporting Colombia to defeat cocaine production, while literally denying the Caribbean air and sea approaches. These efforts forced the drug cartels to move inland and transport their products through Mexico, which already served as a major source of marijuana and heroin. It was this shift in cocaine routes that enabled the drug cartels in Mexico to increase their power bases and eventually take over from the South American DTOs.

Illicit drugs moving through Mexico largely disappeared from all the monitoring, detecting, and interdicting zones that U.S. Southern Command and Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF South) established in the sea and air domains. Drug cartels, such as the Gulf Cartel, Sinaloa Cartel, Arturo Beltran Leyva Organization, Vicente Carrillo Fuentes Organization (Juarez Cartel), Tijuana Cartel/ Arellano-Felix Organization, and Zeta Cartel, operated within their areas without much disruption or interference. The DTOs managed their plazas, and their "business plans" grew and were very profitable. Perhaps it was their efforts to expand their business portfolios by pushing into other cartels' domains that ushered in a new era of heightened violence. Whatever the root cause, cartel-on-cartel violence achieved historic levels as rival cartels tried to expand and secure their areas of operation. This violence has resulted in 52,000 killed since 2006, about 2,000 of whom were members of the security and military forces. President Calderon responded by giving the military a greater role, albeit in support of the civilian police authorities, in the efforts to defeat these threats.

ARNORTH Efforts

Unless it had to do with civil support for natural or man-made disasters, ARNORTH's efforts with interagency partners along the southwest border were for the most part non-existent until 2008. In 2008, the U.S. NORTHCOM commander made ARNORTH his Land Component Command and placed JTF North under its operational control. Prior to that, the efforts to support southwest border security had been a JTF North responsibility.

For 23 years, JTF North has routinely coordinated with interagency partners, including Customs and Border Protection, Drug Enforcement Agency, U.S. Coast Guard, and others, to fulfill their requests for support. These requests generally fit into four major categories: operational support, engineering support, intelligence support, and interagency integration. Because support to DLEA has not been a high priority for the allocation of Department of Defense (DoD) forces, JTF North plans these support missions with volunteer units that desire to train their mission essential task list (METL) tasks in a realistic joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational operational environment with tremendous DoD training value.

This was the extent of DoD support to the southwest border until 2007 when the U.S. and Mexico, as well as Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and several Central American nations became signatories to the Merida Initiative—a multi-year plan with four stated objectives:

- Disrupt transnational criminal organizations.
- Strengthen institutions.
- Build a twenty-first century border.
- Build strong and resilient communities.

ARNORTH has played a key role in advancing these four objectives through an unprecedented program of military-to-

military engagement with the Mexican Army. To put our efforts into perspective, in 2009, U.S. and Mexican armies took part in just three joint training events. During fiscal year 2012, however, they took part in nearly 100 joint training events, ranging from airmobile operations and intelligence analysis to medical treatment and evacuation. Our visits and

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engagements at the senior levels have also expanded significantly. I have personally visited each of the military regions along the southwest border, and throughout this year, we have alternated hosting several 3-star level forums to explore ways we can further our relationship and partnership. We patiently wait to see who will assume Mexico's Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA), and we truly believe these recent forums provide a great foundation to move forward and strengthen and intensify this partnership.

One area where ARNORTH has been able to enhance coordination and collaboration along the southwest border is through border contact meetings. In 2010, through an initiative proposed at the ARNORTH/SEDENA Border Commanders' Conference, the Mexican Army in those military zones along the border received permission to routinely meet with ARNORTH and our partners, the Border Patrol Sector Chiefs, to discuss issues specific to their zone/sector and to look at ways to improve information sharing and operations both formally and informally to

disrupt TCO operations. Because these meetings showed a great deal of promise and contributed to positive operational results on both sides of the border, the Mexican Secretary of National Defense approved their continuation after the first trial year.

We have also established a monthly exchange of information at the senior level with the four southwest border state adjutants general. Sharing of operations between state military forces and federal military forces along the border needed improvement so the adjutants general could keep their governors informed of federal operations in support of interagency DLEA partners. This also helps us to synchronize the state and federal military effort and find efficiencies and synergy where possible.

JTF North has also focused on what it calls point-of-integration operations, where it coordinates with multiple DLEAs across multiple domains (land, air, sea) to create a larger, unified operation with the goal of

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achieving the objectives of each DLEA. These support operations have been conducted in the littorals off San Diego, CA, and Brownsville, TX, as well as in Arizona. JTF North has also successfully conducted coincidental operations with the Mexican Secretariat of the Navy to assist with detecting, monitoring, and interdicting illicit drug trafficking in the maritime domain.

Initiatives to Improve

Some of these thoughts and initiatives are intended to stimulate discussion rather than propose solutions. No one agency will have “the solution,” but all solutions must involve a whole-of-government approach.

As we look to the future with respect to southwest border security, we must understand that Mexico is a vital partner in the overall security of North America. Our interactions with Mexico should be viewed as an opportunity not a challenge. After all, we are inextricably linked. For example, 30 million Americans are of Mexican descent, one million American citizens live in Mexico, Mexico is the second largest supplier of oil to the U.S. (one-third of U.S. imports), and Mexico is the third largest trade partner with the U.S. (after Canada and China). Mexico does matter.

As we assist Mexico to be successful in its fight against the transnational criminal organizations and increase our support to the interagency DLEAs along the southwest border, we must also understand that these TCOs are illegal businesses focused on profit. One of our biggest concerns is the potential of convergence among TCO threats. Specifically, a foreign terrorist organization may pay for the use of a drug trafficking organization’s infrastructure and lines of communication. This is not unique to the southwest border, and the indicators or warning signs may very well come from another region in the world. We must stay vigilant to these warning signs and work closely with the Department of Homeland Security in order to quickly respond to and defeat any threat.

Another initiative we need to address is our effort to disrupt and deny the flow of illegal weapons and money into Mexico. Every time I meet with Mexican military leaders, the first question they ask is what is the U.S. doing to stop the southbound flow of weapons into Mexico? According to Bureau of Alcohol,

Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), out of about 110,000 illegal weapons recovered by the government of Mexico during the past six years, 65,000 came from the U.S.—that is 59 percent of the weapons recovered. If this reporting is accurate, we should seriously look at what options are available that could directly assist the Mexican government in its fight against the TCOs.

The question often asked is whether the U.S. needs a JIATF along the southwest border. While we have seen the creation of JIATFs in the Caribbean and Pacific that have been very successful in the air and maritime domains, we have not determined how to form a JIATF for the land domain. Who would be the lead federal agency? Would its focus only be on counterdrug or would it expand to other areas? History has shown that our adversaries always try to exploit our seams and gaps, so how could we better interconnect efforts of JIATF South and JIATF West with efforts on the mainland to eliminate the seams and gaps and give our adversaries fewer options to exploit?

The Army is now implementing regionally aligned forces that will provide capabilities to combatant commanders for their theater security cooperation activities. In the homeland, we see this initiative as a way to not only provide training assistance to the Mexican Army, but also as a way to provide further assistance to DLEA partners, which would increase the number of METL-focused opportunities. We may even see some capability of the regionally aligned forces allocated to NORTHCOM in this fiscal year.

On the first of December, a newly elected Mexican President, Enrique Peña Nieto, will take office and lead Mexico for the next six years. He proposes to:

- Expand drug-war partnership with the U.S. by hosting U.S. military instructors but not combat troops or agents. He approves of continued use of surveillance drone missions, but they would be run by Mexicans.
- Create a single state police force and a rural gendarmerie while expanding the federal police.
- Change metrics from eliminating high value targets to reducing the level of violence.

He does not endorse the two countries pursuing the kind of joint armed counternarcotics operations carried out by U.S. forces in Colombia and Central America—“no boots on the ground.”

Given what the Peña Nieto administration has publically stated, we feel confident that we can build upon our recent work and further expand our growing military partnership. In the long term, we envision our relationship with the Mexican Army strengthening as a strategic partner so we can integrate our strategic plans in the cooperative defense of North America.

We will also reach out to our interagency partners and identify the homeland in an operational context to develop a southwest border campaign plan that identifies southwest border security issues for the next five to ten years. We do not want to take charge or be in the lead, but rather bring some of our expertise as planners and operators into the consortium to build a unified plan.

It is a strategic imperative to enhance North American security for the future. To do so, we need to continue to be open and find ways to improve interagency and international cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. The more we institutionalize relationships with the Mexican Army and U.S. interagency partners, the greater the likelihood of having the long-term effects and whole-of-government solutions we strive to achieve in pursuit of our common goals against our common TCO threats. **IAJ**