

1-1-2011

Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 4: Texas Border Security: A Strategic Military Assessment

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Recommended Citation

Bunker, Robert J. "Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 4: Texas Border Security: A Strategic Military Assessment." *Small Wars Journal*. 12 Oct. 2011: 1-2.

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Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 4

Texas Border Security: A Strategic Military Assessment

By [Robert Bunker](#)

SWJ Blog Post Oct 12 2011 - 4:16pm

The Document: Texas Border Security: A Strategic Military Assessment was published in September 2011 and authored by Barry McCaffrey and Robert Scales, Ph.D. — both retired Army generals and highly respected national security thinkers. Colgen (www.colgen.net) was commissioned by Texas Department of Agriculture which was tasked by the Texas Legislature to undertake this assessment. The document, which garnered significant media attention when first released, can be accessed at: www.texasagriculture.gov/.../46982_Final%20Report-Texas%20Border%20Security.pdf

The main document is 59 pages in length and also contains a section with additional pages composed of twelve attachments. The document has an executive summary and a general bibliography of works influencing the assessment but is not endnoted. The study was initially prompted by the pleas of rural farmers and ranchers in Texas to help secure the border due to the Mexican cartels establishing themselves on their lands. Per Commissioner Todd Staples, Texas Department of Agriculture:

The report offers a military perspective on how to best incorporate strategic, operational, and tactical measures to secure the increasingly hostile border regions along the Rio Grande River. It also provides sobering evidence of cartel criminals gaining ground on Texas soil.

In addition to a discussion of the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of conflict, high points of the report go on to discuss Texas as a narco-sanctuary, the State of Texas' organization for combat via a Unified Command system, the role of the Texas Rangers, the effectiveness and flexibility of the system utilized by Texas law enforcement, and solving border security problems together. General recommendations in paragraph form are then provided concerning communications and the network, operations, intelligence, technology, and learning to further enhance the Texas border security system.

Analysis: This is a very significant and cogent assessment and will greatly impact the Mexican cartel debate that is taking place in the United States. What is most striking is that the State of Texas was compelled to commission a report that took a military analytical perspective on Mexican cartel spillover—essentially narco-sanctuary emergence on American soil with dedicated battalion/brigade level equivalent C (command and control) facilities (p. 19). While such sanctuaries have been established in Central America by the cartels, the fact that they are now found in the border counties of Texas is of immense concern. Additionally, the attachments found in the report were meant to provide concrete proof of the magnitude of the threat posed by the cartels and their gang associates in both Texas and Mexico.

While the report will primarily have operational level utility, via the recommendations made, for Texas law enforcement, it raises more strategic and political questions than it answers—thought this surely has to be part of the intent of the Texas Legislature in commissioning it. The report helps to bring the

media spotlight to the conflict in Texas— one of the many theaters of operations the cartels and gangs are now engaged—albeit a transit center of gravity into the US with all the major plazas it contains.

One strategic question raised concerns the corruptive influence of the cartels in addition to their propensity for violence. The assessment was written by retired generals and is primarily focused on cartel ‘combat potentials’ and a military-like response to them. Of increasing concern is the undermining of US public and law enforcement officials and institutions. This poses an equal if not greater threat to the State of Texas. The *Plata O Plomo* (Silver or Lead) technique of using corruption and violence directed against a law enforcement unit to negate it is synergistic in nature and no different in many ways than the use of armor, infantry, and artillery forces to negate an opposing military unit.

One broader political question raised by this report is the relationship between the US Federal Government and the State of Texas. The Federal Government has many obligations to the entire nation—to ensure our economic prosperity (via programs such as NAFTA), to provide for the health and welfare of US citizens (via National Drug Control policy), and to maintain lawful immigration and guest visitor programs (via National Immigration policy). Arguably, it is not scoring high marks on the later of these obligations and very mixed results on the former ones. Where it is fully deficient is in contending with Mexican cartel penetration into the United States, the association of these cartels with gangs and other criminal groups, and the more encompassing illicit economies on which they capitalize. The State of Texas is facing much of the brunt of this issue— though Arizona is also significantly impacted with the kidnappings, incidents of public corruption, and cartel operatives deployed in its border zones.

By all appearances, ‘Texas is being hung out to dry’ by the current executive administration and legislative houses in Washington DC. While this might not be the case, the current DC power structures appear for the most part either in denial or at a loss or unable to respond to the situation taking place in Texas. Quite possibly we are now faced with an “intractable national problem” that is coinciding with massive governmental debt and deficit, polarized political parties full of too many politicians and too few statesmen, a still recovering global economy, and an upcoming presidential election year. None of these bode well for the situation in Texas, a state that is increasingly on a combat footing against Mexican cartel intrusions onto sovereign US soil.

About the Author

Robert Bunker

Dr. Robert J. Bunker holds degrees in political science, government, behavioral science, social science, anthropology-geography, and history. Training taken includes that provided by DHS, FLETC, DIA, Cal DOJ, Cal POST, LA JRIC, NTOA, and private security entities in counter-terrorism, counter-surveillance, incident-response, force protection, and intelligence. Dr. Bunker has been involved in red teaming and counter-terrorism exercises and has provided operations support within Los Angeles County.

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