

Strategy Research Project

Leveraging Army Counterinsurgency Training to Secure the Southern U.S. Border

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Abstract

Fiscal and political constraints have limited the manpower and equipment resources that would enable DHS to better secure the southern border, and the timeline associated with expanding that force would take several additional years before impacting security. Meanwhile, the dramatic decrease in combat deployments of Regular Army Stryker Brigade Combat Teams (SBCT) prevents large percentages of junior leaders from gaining the experiences that are crucial to their professional development and future combat abilities. These skills include the simple acts of deployment preparation and execution, establishing Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) and communications architectures, as well as the more complex tasks of interagency coordination of current operations and integrating outside forces into a formation. Deploying Regular Army units to the border enables units to gain invaluable deployment and COIN training while supporting DHS efforts to secure the border against illegal activity. The associated strategic communications planning and execution, along with partnered operations would have significant impact on the border region.

Leveraging Army Counterinsurgency Training to Secure the Southern U.S. Border

As large scale combat deployments begin to occur less frequently, critical counterinsurgency knowledge and experience will become less and less common across the force. As an example, U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan have dropped to as few as 8,400 in 2016 from a peak of 100,000 in 2010¹. Leaders may not deploy overseas for entire assignments, losing invaluable opportunities to develop the necessary skill sets and experiences to enable future success in positions of greater responsibility. As Leaders and Soldiers progress through their careers with no overseas deployment or COIN experience, the potential exists for necessary skills and lessons learned to fade. Home station and combat training center (CTC) training opportunities are limited by both availability and effectiveness, which will lead to significant gaps in our COIN readiness and capability. Conducting border security missions and training with federal and local law enforcement mission are each components of counterinsurgency doctrine and tasks for tactical units.²

At the same time, the United States faces a growing threat of terrorist infiltration and increasingly extreme levels of illegal migration across the southern U.S. border. Border Patrol forces apprehended 408,870 illegal aliens in FY 2016 in the Southwest Border Sector, a staggering number even before considering the assumed number of crossings that went undeterred.³ A study completed in 2014 concluded that the Border Patrol was successful in interdicting just 55% of attempted illegal border crossings,⁴ which means that nearly 750,000 crossings were successful. The passage of U.S. legislation legalizing marijuana in several states brought about a change to the business model of Mexican cartels. They have moved away from the smuggling of marijuana and have nearly doubled the amount of heroin imported to the U.S..⁵ Large expanses of the

southern border are under manned at best and unprotected at worst, leaving the Nation vulnerable to a variety of threats and providing criminal organizations with the ability conduct their operations nearly unimpeded. A local law enforcement officer responsible for policing a portion of the Arizona border region said, “On a good day we might get 20 percent [of the illegal drugs and immigrants]. Normally we're probably getting five to 10 percent. And I would say that's everyone: Border Patrol, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, [and] the other task forces.”⁶ The scarcity of officers prevents them from making arrests even when they observe illegal activity. Forced to operate alone in order cover wider swaths of territory, officers cannot “apprehend armed traffickers without backup.”⁷

Local and federal law enforcement has lacked the resources and authorities to successfully secure the southern border for years, but even accounting for recent elections and changes in government policy will require significant amounts of time and resources to achieve success in this endeavor. The timeline to generate additional border protection personnel, the resources required to equip and sustain them during operations on the border, and the possibility of constructing physical barriers will take time to debate, fund, and execute. The flow of dangerous individuals and materials across the border will continue to occur at an even greater rate before the efforts to increase law enforcement forces to secure the border can be completed.⁸

The following pages will describe a means of solving both of these problems by deploying a Regular Army Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) in regular training rotations to the southern U.S. border. Leveraging the capabilities of an SBCT in support of ongoing border enforcement activities will increase the safety and effectiveness of

Border Patrol operations, while simultaneously providing valuable training for Leaders and Soldiers at every echelon of the deployed formation. A discussion of the proposed concept will detail deployment planning considerations and the experience to be gained by a deployment to the southern U.S. border. Critical to appreciating the concept is a thorough understanding of the doctrine and legal issues that surround deployments of Regular Army units within the Homeland, so a discussion of the Posse Comitatus Act and associated legislation, doctrine, directives, and regulations, will illuminate both challenges and opportunities. The benefits and increased capability provided to Customs and Border Protection, especially the Border Patrol, will also be defined and discussed. The proposed concept is not without risk, and the deployment must be justified and explained to both domestic and international audiences. The decision to deploy forces to the border must be accompanied with a thorough description of the protective measures put in place to ensure the maintenance of civil liberties and established force protection measures. A detailed discussion of strategic communication planning requirements and some of the potential risks involved will clarify the challenges in establishing this mission to defend the homeland from a growing threat.

The U.S. has significantly reduced the frequency and numbers of Brigade level deployments in support of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). While the decline in combat is welcome for many reasons, the training and experience it provides for the force is not replaceable in a home station environment. Combat training centers (CTC), such as the Joint Readiness Training Center or National Training Center, provide additional realism, but the focus for these training events has shifted to “getting back to

a linear fight as opposed to a COIN fight.”⁹ Combined with additional training requirements and increased focus on expeditionary operations¹⁰, they are less likely to provide an immersive COIN experience for developing Leaders. This loss of experience in COIN activities, tactical employment of organic forces, and even the mechanics of deploying large numbers of Soldiers and equipment will result in reduced effectiveness in future campaigns if no viable alternative is created to provide the experience in a timely manner.

This critical training gap can be filled while simultaneously leveraging that training to assist the Border Patrol in securing the border against crossings from criminal organizations, illegal immigrants, and terrorists.

Deployment Concept

For the purpose of this discussion we will focus on the deployment of an SBCT to the southern U.S. to train in essential COIN tasks and assist law enforcement agencies in securing the border. The SBCT brings seven battalions: three infantry battalions, a cavalry squadron, an artillery battalion, a special troops battalion, and a brigade support battalion. These battalions, and the SBCT headquarters, combine to provide over 4,400 Soldiers.¹¹ The Stryker vehicles provide excellent mobility and extensive communications and situational awareness capabilities that are rarely tested in home station training environments. The potential deployment under discussion will allow the SBCT to utilize their organic capabilities, and provide real time awareness of patrol locations and activities to the border patrol units they are supporting. Selection of an SBCT also allows the garrison and division headquarters to exercise vehicle deployment training, further enhancing the value of this operation.

Prior to the deployment to the border, the SBCT would conduct home station training similar to the training mandated for a combat deployment. Conducted in partnership with assigned Border Patrol agents, this training would include extensive training on legal considerations, interaction with law enforcement and local populations, use of force restrictions and authorities, and the extreme importance of civil-military relations. The language differences found in the border region will force the majority of Leaders to employ interpreters, present and compensated throughout the formations already, further adding to the training value of the mission. Pre-deployment Site Surveys (PDSS) will allow Leaders to understand the environment, the inherent risks, and to begin developing relationships with the agencies they will support. The SBCT will conduct pre-deployment training events with the Border Patrol units they would serve with, to enable seamless integration of the systems and capabilities the military provides with the authorities and procedures of the Border Patrol. Carefully designed and specifically focused live fire training events will ensure the readiness of Leaders and Soldiers to control their formations, decisions, and organic small arms fire should the need arise. Communication systems will be established to ensure compatibility with law enforcement and civilian frequency management requirements prior to deployment, and the integration of civilian personnel will be managed to ensure compliance with security regulations and statutes. These training events, and the administrative tasks that will be accomplished, will ensure that the deploying units are fully ready to complete their assigned tasks and that they gain experience in deploying units in a realistic manner for future operations.

Following this pre-deployment workup for training along the border, the SBCT would deploy to a region on the border and establish locations similar in function to Forward Operating Bases (FOB) and Combat Outposts (COP) from which to conduct their patrols and life support activities. Establishing multiple locations will better replicate combat conditions and force the utilization of the communications and command and control systems. Concurrently, it will allow junior leaders a level of autonomy, while planning and conducting partnered operations, and in their daily interactions with local leaders. Additionally, this dispersion will create conditions favorable to building effective relationships with assigned law enforcement agencies, civil leaders, and local populations. The pre-deployment training will provide immediate benefits during the establishment of these locations, as each Platoon and Company element will have assigned Border Patrol agents to facilitate their initial movement to the area of operations and area familiarization. This partnership, established during pre-deployment events, will continue throughout the operation. Credentialed law enforcement officers with each military patrol will provide familiarization with the local environment, allow for legal apprehensions, and minimize concerns from external actors.

The unit will be able to train on tasks in nearly every warfighting function in a realistic environment, with stressors and challenges similar to an overseas deployment, at every echelon of the formation. With the exceptions of delivering indirect fires and close air support, the SBCT will train on tasks from navigation to sustainment, from reconnaissance to strategic communication, and from training law enforcement to providing mobility support to CBP personnel.¹² The support provided to the Border Patrol will be akin to the requirements to train a foreign security force. In the process,

the Border Patrol will have access to the increased manpower, mobility, communications, and-perhaps most importantly-the Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets organic to the SBCT. The establishment of combined operations centers, in accordance with Army training and COIN doctrine¹³, will add an additional resource for training the SBCT, and significantly enhance the situational awareness of the Border Patrol.

These resources, combined with the environment and appropriate authorities, will enable both the military and the Border Patrol to leverage each other for increased effectiveness in both current and future operations. But the relationship with the embedded Border Patrol agents is critical to the success of this concept, as will be discussed in greater detail below.

Legal Precedence and Justification

Concern over the employment of active duty Soldiers for law enforcement operations within the borders of the United States, in apparent violation of the Posse Comitatus Act (PCA), would be ill-founded. In reality, the use of the military to secure the border is authorized in both law and in practice. An increased understanding of the Act will dispel the myths surrounding this legislation and enable national leaders to fully employ the military as envisioned in this proposal. The authorities inherent in Homeland Defense and Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) also play an important role in this operation. Similar combined operations occur around the nation on a routine basis, and have been an essential element of our National security for decades.¹⁴

There is a long history of Army units securing the U.S. border with Mexico. As early as 1914, U.S. Army troops were sent to Columbus, New Mexico to defend the city from cross-border raiding, and then to mark and patrol the border as conflict within

Mexico escalated.¹⁵ The number of troops, and their role, gradually escalated to more than 12,000 troops at the highest point.¹⁶ More recently, the Department of Defense and National Guard have been involved in counterdrug missions along the border beginning in the 1980s.¹⁷ Marine units were involved in counter drug operations in 1997 until a fatal shooting led to their removal.¹⁸ After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, National Guard troops were federalized to assist in providing security for the southern and northern borders. Both active and reserve forces were again sent to the northern border to defend against anticipated threats in 2004 as part of Operation Winter Freeze.¹⁹ Then in 2006, large numbers of National Guard troops were deployed to the border as part of Operation Jump Start.²⁰ Perhaps most germane to this discussion was the deployment of a Stryker cavalry squadron to the New Mexico border in 2005 as part of the unit's pre-deployment training for an upcoming combat deployment to Iraq. This unit was credited with assisting the Border Patrol in apprehending 2,500 illegal immigrants in 60 days.²¹ Brigadier General Jose D. Rojas, the Joint Task Force – North Commanding General at the time, explained that the Stryker equipped unit was able to employ “state of the art surveillance equipment in an effort to assist the U.S Border Patrol in their mission to secure our borders.”²² The statement also emphasized the relevance of the deployment, “The military units and personnel that volunteer to execute these vital homeland security missions gain tremendous training opportunities that are directly related to their wartime duties.”²³ This deployment was a crucial aspect in preparing the unit for their mission in Iraq as they were able to train in conditions similar to what they would face overseas and fully exercise all of their mission command and surveillance equipment. The deployment was also beneficial to the Border Patrol elements that they

supported as evidenced by the dramatic increase in apprehension rates during their time on the border.

The most direct way to gain a legal authorization for the deployment of active duty units within the borders of the United States is to utilize Homeland Defense authorities. "Homeland defense is the protection of United States sovereignty, territory, domestic population, and critical infrastructure against external threats and aggression or other threats as directed by the President."²⁴ The continuing stream of illegal immigrants, operations by criminal organizations, and the near certainty that the porous southern border is being exploited by terrorist organizations is a direct threat to the critical elements listed above. "A monthly surge of 10,000 to 15,000 illegal alien apprehensions" between 2015 and 2016 across the southern border indicates that current enforcement mechanisms are not sufficient to stop the flow of illegal immigrants, substances, or possible terrorists across the border.²⁵ The proposed mission for the deployed units, as well as the expected relationships between the military, local governments, and federal and local law enforcement falls directly in line with current doctrine. As stated in Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0 Operations, "In homeland defense, Department of Defense and Army forces work closely with federal, state, territorial, tribal, local, and private agencies."²⁶

With a Presidential acknowledgement of the direct threat to American sovereignty, territory, or population, the employment of military forces to secure the border is more than justified. However, the concerns about violating the Posse Comitatus Act will continue to impact decisions to utilize the forces most capable of deterring and defeating the threats to our border region and our Nation. The Posse

Comitatus Act was passed in 1878 as a result of the newly reestablished Federal government's extensive use of the military to "control southern affairs."²⁷ The act significantly limits the use of federal troops in the "enforcement of state civil law", but does not apply to state militias nor does it completely prohibit the employment of federal forces.²⁸ There have been multiple exceptions to the Posse Comitatus Act, including the sharing of "equipment and information with civilian law enforcement" agencies and, most importantly, homeland defense.²⁹

It is important to realize that "[T]he intent of the act was not to preclude the Army from enforcing the law but instead was designed to allow the Army to do this only when directed to do so by the President or Congress."³⁰ There have been several modifications and exceptions to the Act, primarily designed to increase military equipment and support authorizations in support of counterdrug operations.³¹ The Defense Authorization Act of 1982 increased authorities for military forces to assist law enforcement through training, equipment loans and maintenance, and to train those forces in relevant tactics and procedures. Additionally, the Authorization Act allowed military units to share "any information collected during the normal course of military operations that could be relevant to a violation of any federal or state law".³² And in 2004, additional changes to U.S. code were made to increase the ability of the military to conduct homeland defense activities.³³

Even with legal justification provided by Presidential or Congressional action, the military would not be operating in a law enforcement role independently. Embedded Border Patrol agents with each maneuver element and command and control node will ensure that actions and authorities are synchronized at the tactical through operational

level, and to ensure that all strategic ends are achieved. Much like patrols in Afghanistan and Iraq had embedded local security forces to enable legal searches and arrests, the presence of credentialed Border Patrol agents will serve multiple purposes. They will perform the investigations and any resultant arrests, while ensuring that the patrols adhere to all legal requirements. Additionally, the integration of military and law enforcement will enable cross training for both formations and facilitate both synchronization and situational awareness across all relevant organizations and activities. Communication structures and technology that are not currently possessed by the border patrol or local law enforcement will be accessible by them through this partnership, increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of combined operations and providing yet another training benefit for the deployed force.

Mutual Training and Operational Benefits

As described above, the SBCTs would provide particular and extensive benefits to Border Patrol forces, and local law enforcement agencies. The integration of training and support to civil authorities has been defined in both policy and practice. Explicit guidance from successive Defense Secretaries highlighted the importance of leveraging military training to provide incidental support to law enforcement agencies. A 2012 memorandum directed military commanders to “incorporate LEA [Law Enforcement Agency] information requirements from the border areas, or approaches to the homeland, into Service and Combatant training plans to the maximum extent practicable within existing legal authorities and mission essential tasks.”³⁴

Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel issued similar guidance the following year, specifying that the training scheduled must not “adversely affect military training” and that the “principal purpose of training is to enhance the readiness of the force.”³⁵ But

many types of military units would gain experience in training in this environment, while simultaneously providing assistance to these civil law enforcement functions.

Military units will gain critical deployment and operational experience already described above. U.S. military units assigned to this operation will have the opportunity to develop additional skills specific to the mission and environment. The embedded Border Patrol agents will leverage their institutional training, experience, and operational skills to train partnered military units. This experience will allow them to teach Soldiers how to interpret the signs left by passing humans and to track the individuals and groups moving cross country to avoid detection.³⁶ This skill would be extremely useful in the execution of future combat deployments and has been difficult to incorporate into home station training plans. The medical treatment, triage, and evacuation capabilities organic and attached to the unit will likewise receive extensive training. With thousands of illegals crossing the border, there are multiple personnel each day that are injured by the terrain, the environment, or the smugglers paid to bring them across.

At the end of fiscal year 2014, there had been 307 deaths reported along the southwestern border. The majority of these were due to exposure to the elements, but violence among narcotic and human smugglers is always a factor. BORSTAR teams [a Border Patrol Special Operations Group] works to stay ahead of these daunting numbers. Its teams were called out 1,079 times in 2014; 1,793 times in 2013.³⁷

As pressure on known routes increases, illegal border crossings shift to more remote and more dangerous areas.³⁸ The addition of military forces will increase the number of contacts made with illegal immigrants, and will rapidly outpace the medical capabilities of Border Patrol elements already under immense pressure. Medics at every echelon will be employed to treat and evacuate personnel as required and that training will be employed for the duration of the operation and their career. Finally, the

integration with federal and local law enforcement will set an example for Soldiers and Leaders alike who are thrust into unfamiliar roles during deployments abroad. The shared experiences and examples will provide context and model behavior during operations on the border, and would continue to improve their performance in future operations.

The Border Patrol agents will similarly benefit from close and daily contact with Soldiers and the resources they bring to the region. The organic mobility, command and control, and ISR capabilities will significantly increase the capability of the Border Patrol to secure the border. Attached air assets will increase each of these functions, and provide a level of flexibility that will significantly disrupt smuggling operations. The synchronization of air mobility and persistent ISR assets will deny the ability of scouts used by criminal organizations to identify and evade patrols.³⁹ The additional personnel provided by the SBCT will allow the Border Patrol to surge into areas that have been refuges for criminal activity, or to deny large areas of the border for extended durations. And given the restrictions of establishing permanent stations on some public and private lands, the expeditionary nature of an Infantry unit will ensure the rapid establishment of temporary patrol bases across the unit's area of responsibility without violating environmental or budgetary restrictions.⁴⁰ The extensive logistical assets of an SBCT will aid the Border Patrol in moving apprehended personnel, equipment, and extend the reach of patrols that have been constrained by a lack of resources. Just as the Soldiers and Leaders will benefit from the tracking experience of the Border Patrol, the Soldiers will be able to provide essential patrolling and tactical training to the agents they work

with on a daily basis ensuring their increased safety and effectiveness long after the deployment is over.⁴¹

Strategic Communication Planning Considerations

A critical component of the decision to deploy federal troops to secure the border will be the manner in which the threat, the decision, and the operations are described to the public. The method for communicating these elements cannot be designed and executed solely by the unit conducting the operation; it must be a strategic communication campaign conducted across the three tiers of federal, state and local government. Organizational or strategic communication is defined as

sustained and coherent activities, conducted across strategic, operational, and tactical levels that enables the understanding of target audiences, identifies effective conduits, and develops and promotes ideas and opinions through those conduits to promote and sustain particular types of behavior.⁴²

The military specifically, and government in general, have struggled to develop a cohesive and coherent strategic message throughout the past decade of conflict. This challenge is a result of several different factors based on training and culture within the military. Among these factors are “information fratricide at all levels,” struggling to match the correct “message, medium and audience,” and failing to balance short and long term objectives.⁴³ Perhaps an even more significant cause of the difficulty in establishing and maintaining a strategic message is that “at the tactical and operational levels of war, U.S. forces have been trained to fight, not influence.”⁴⁴ Military personnel that are trained and experienced in developing these messaging campaigns are rarely found at the tactical level, increasing the requirement for a coordinated and combined effort. Given the extreme importance of this endeavor, extensive consideration should be given to obtaining the support of commercial and nongovernmental expertise to

ensure that strategic communications planning, execution, and assessment is successful.⁴⁵

A readily available model for planning and executing a strategic communications campaign in support of this operation was created by Dr. Thomas Galvin and Professor Charles Allen consisting of four components. The four components of this method are: Promote the narrative, Defend the narrative, Target others' narrative, and Adapt the narrative.⁴⁶

In promoting the narrative, the campaign design and actions on the ground prove that the narrative is accurate and relevant with a minimum of Leader intervention. If done effectively the "campaigns should help narratives sell themselves."⁴⁷ To defend the narrative it is imperative to discredit opposing counter narratives, which is done most effectively by providing "alternative perspectives."⁴⁸ In this case, counter narratives could arise out of misunderstanding, ranging from intent to authorizations. Conversely, with an offensive mindset, strategic communications planners can pre-emptively target the adversary's narrative. Here again, our "adversary" could be nothing more than simple, but potentially disruptive misinterpretation of the federal government's intention; therefore, deliberate measures should be built into our own narrative to circumvent these misgivings. Since a strategic narrative should be "stable but not static," the final step in this process is to adapt the narrative in the face of changing conditions or to account for "legitimate criticisms" from both friendly and adversarial points of view.⁴⁹

To apply this construct to the possibility of deploying an SBCT to the border would require detailed coordination, but the opportunity for success is significantly increased if the narrative is constructed well before the decision to deploy forces is

announced. The reasoning behind the deployment of federal forces, and the threat that led to that decision, must be carefully defined and explained to both domestic and foreign audiences, and to segments of those populations that are both supportive and opposed to the operation. Creating the narrative must be an interagency process, with input from the Departments of Defense, State, and Homeland Security at a minimum. Planners for the narrative must be embedded with the planners of the deployment and operations on the border to ensure synchronization and understanding are maintained across the spectrum of involved agencies and departments. The strategic narrative must accurately and fully describe the actions of the deployed forces and the restrictions placed upon them, along with the closely monitored integration of both federal and local law enforcement agencies. This will provide a positional advantage from which to defend the narrative as the operation begins. At the operational level, unit commanders must not deviate from their stated mission nor can they exceed their original mandate without detailed consultations to adjust the narrative. Any discrepancies between what is said and what is observed will discredit the operation.

Despite the best efforts of commanders and communicators, those opposed to the use of military forces to secure the border will ardently attack the concept. The defense of the narrative must anticipate and account for these arguments, relying on the directives of the President and Congress that authorized the deployment. Civil and military authorities must educate concerned constituents regarding legal precedence, and provide explanations for the actual intent of the Posse Comitatus Act. And, of course, they must highlight the numerous threats to our National security posed by unchecked immigration. Planners must also anticipate potential incidents that will occur

as part of the deployment and develop responses prior to their actual occurrence. These events may include issues such as damages to fences or farmland incidental to the mission, vehicular accidents, local residents complaining of increased noise and traffic, or even the use of force events resulting from contact with opposing criminal elements.⁵⁰ The priority of effort should be designated to proactively attacking counternarratives rather than reactively defending our own message and operations. Maintaining this momentum and offensive communications capability will require the continuation of detailed and constant coordination between deployed forces and those elements designing and delivering the strategic narrative.

The last step in executing this communication campaign is adapting the narrative. It is imperative, in this regard, that planners are anticipatory in their actions. The simple announcement of the deployment will change the environment along the U.S.-Mexico border, and the narrative must account for changes throughout the operation. Where the populace may feel a degree of apprehension, the narrative must adapt to dissuade concerns, promote the success and safety of operations, and emphasize the contribution of the operations to border security efforts. To circumvent tensions among Mexican officials, the message must be constructed to ease any concerns on their behalf, while maintaining the focus and credibility of the mission.

Risk

While the failure to properly communicate the strategic goals of this operation present a significant risk, execution of a successful strategic communication plan will serve to mitigate the other possible risks to the mission. First among the potential risks is an event involving the improper use of deadly force by forces deployed in support of this mission. As alluded to earlier in the paper, a tragic shooting of a civilian by U.S.

Marines conducting counterdrug operations, poorly prepared for the conduct of their mission, had a significant impact on public perception. Resulting protests against the operation saw activists marching in Washington, D.C. with “signs urging an end to "military terror against civilians"”.⁵¹

Equally dangerous to the mission is excessive restraint in the authorization of use of force for deployed military forces. The border region has become increasingly more violent. In September 2016, drug cartels shot down a Mexican military helicopter,⁵² and a recent Mexican police video “showed a pick-up truck fitted with a mounted machine gun circling a gas station during a two-minute exchange of gunfire.”⁵³ Soldiers must be able to defend themselves, partnered law enforcement officers, and American citizens as necessary in the execution of their assigned duties. The public and political outrage over a Soldier being wounded or killed by drug traffickers or human smugglers, as a result of restrictions on the use of force in self-defense, would dramatically alter the course of the operation. The presence of “rip crews”, armed groups that ambush and rob drug smugglers in the border region, in close proximity to American forces, could create the conditions for the use of lethal force as the criminals pose a lethal threat with hostile intent.⁵⁴

A third risk to the mission is the loss of support from the civilian population in the area of operations. This support could be jeopardized as a result of damages to property during patrols, vehicular accidents, or simply the friction created by the presence of large numbers of Soldiers in the area. A misperception of the military’s actions, or the intent behind those actions, could also create a rift between the local population and the deployed forces.

Finally, the movement of military forces to actively secure the southern border could precipitate an increase in violence from both Mexican cartels and independent human smugglers. The opportunities for chance contact and misperceptions are greatest at the beginning of the mission, when the SBCT is still learning the mission and the environment.⁵⁵

Each of these risks can and must be mitigated prior to the start of operations, and monitored throughout execution to maintain the effectiveness and legitimacy of the mission as well as the safety of the deployed Soldiers. The concerns over the use of lethal or non-lethal force can be mitigated with a combination of training and communication. Home station marksmanship and legal training, combined with interoperability training with partnered Border Patrol, will provide Soldiers and Leaders with the skills and confidence to judiciously employ force when warranted. The strategic communication plan previously described will inform domestic and foreign audiences of U.S. force capabilities and authorities. This focused messaging effort will reinforce the inherent right of self-defense of our Soldiers and set conditions for future messaging related to particular incidents

Army Leaders at every level will be required to adapt to the new mission and authorities this initiative would contain, and trust and empower subordinates to operate effectively within the limits of their mission. Active engagement with the local civilian population will help secure public support and better enable military Leaders to reduce tensions and generate additional support for the operation. As in Afghanistan and Iraq, junior Leaders must build relations with civil leaders, and make themselves available and accountable. Beyond fulfilling a valuable training requirement, this engagement will

strengthen support, and serve as a means of surveilling and conveying information on routes used for illegal crossings, quickly transporting Border Patrol to intercept those crossings, and a host of other benefits to the CBP mission.⁵⁶ The engagements with civilian government leaders and individuals must be closely tied to strategic communication planning, and accurate reporting of engagements will synchronize messaging efforts and assessments of campaign progress. Finally, the potential risk of an escalation of violence in the region as criminal elements react to the arrival of U.S. forces will be reduced through proactive messaging and diplomatic efforts.

Clearly articulating the purpose of the mission, the authorities granted to the forces, and defining their role will reduce tensions between the governments. Making criminals aware of the increased capabilities present in the region will deter confrontation and force them to change methods and routes which will increase the opportunities to interdict their movement.

Despite these efforts to reduce the impact of identified risks, there will be unforeseen threats to the mission. The ability to defend and adapt the narrative will be critical to the perceived success of the operation, regardless of the perceptions of that success on the ground. Proactive engagements with leaders and residents will further reduce risks, and increase support provided to the mission in both sentiment and information. National and military leadership must accept the residual risk and empower subordinate Leaders with the appropriate authorities and trust them to accomplish the mission. The greatest risk is doing nothing and allowing the border to remain unguarded.

Conclusion

The southern border remains vulnerable to illegal transit of illicit materials, drugs, and humans. The Border Patrol, while well trained and experienced, is undermanned and underequipped to deal with the scope of the problem. The capability gaps of federal and local law enforcement are known on both sides of the border, and to the criminal elements that would exploit those gaps. Clear demonstration of an increased commitment to securing our borders, may well serve to increase the urgency of people seeking to cross the border in the near future. This urgency is likely to further outpace the ability of the Border Patrol to interdict the flow. In this scenario, the employment of military force in the defense of the homeland is more than justified, it is required.

With appropriate training, leadership, and legal authority, the rotational deployment of an SBCT could fill some of the existing gaps in federal, state and local law enforcement capabilities while gaining valuable experience in a deployment with both operational and training value. The deployment of the entire formation, establishment of operating bases and out posts, employment of all organic command, control, and communications systems, all engaged in operations in partnership with Border Patrol and local law enforcement will help to fill the training void created by the slowed rate of combat deployments. Military Leaders and Soldiers at every level of the formation will gain insights, skills, and invaluable experiences that will serve them in future deployments for the duration of their career. Concurrently, the Border Patrol will benefit from the increased manpower, mobility, situational awareness, and logistics that the military unit will provide, resulting in an immediate and substantial benefit in efforts to secure the border. Likewise, if our experience overseas is an indicator, the mere

presence of a force of this nature will add to the deterrent effect of law enforcement against entry of illegal aliens in the Southwest.

The decision to deploy active duty Soldiers to the border is not unprecedented, but will not be uncontested. An integrated strategic communications plan, synchronized across the interagency, through federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, and throughout the depth of the deployed formation, must be developed, monitored, and adjusted as necessary during the entire operation. The message associated with the mission may prove to be more significant than the actions of the Soldiers executing the operation, and will ultimately determine the perceived success of the deployment, regardless of the resultant training benefits and increased border security. The strategic communications plan will be key in addressing risks that must be identified, acknowledged, and mitigated, during this mission. Finally, whatever the likelihood, kinetic events, military casualties, and the momentary loss of support from national or local populations must be anticipated. Contingency plans must be formulated accordingly as a function of leadership's preparations to adapt to potential changes in the environment.

It is well within the authority of the President to order the deployments as outlined above. As the security of the Mexican border remains in question, the decision to do so will rapidly become a topic of debate. With the strategic vision of senior military Leaders and the operational capability of underutilized SBCTs, the military stands capable and ready to provide valuable support to the Border Patrol. This mission would serve to ensure the security of the U.S. in the short term, while providing a training opportunity that will develop skills and Leaders to guarantee the long-term security of the Nation.

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