

**NATIONAL SOUTHWEST BORDER
COUNTERNARCOTICS STRATEGY**

Unclassified Summary

INTRODUCTION

The harsh climate, vast geography, and sparse population of the American Southwest have long posed challenges to law enforcement and security efforts along the nearly 2,000 mile border with Mexico. In addition to the dozens of legitimate crossing points, the border covers hundreds of miles of open desert, rugged mountains, coastal waters, and the Rio Grande River, providing an ideal environment for cross-border criminal activity. Drug traffickers exploit the border in two directions, smuggling drugs from Mexico into the United States and moving weapons and billions of dollars in illicit drug profits back into Mexico.

Drugs are smuggled across the Southwest Border using almost any means imaginable, including hidden compartments in cars and trucks, tunnels and aqueducts, backpackers on foot, lightweight aircraft and gliders, All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), package delivery services, motorized launches, and floating rafts across the Rio Grande. The result is the flow of hundreds of tons of cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, and marijuana into the United States from Mexico, of which only a small percentage is seized. Too many of these interdictions are the result of “cold hits” – detections that were not cued by prior intelligence.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, the Southwest Border has assumed even greater significance. The threat of terrorism looms large wherever criminals regularly exploit gaps in homeland security. Terrorists could conceivably attempt to enter the United States or smuggle weapons of mass destruction (WMD) across the Southwest Border by utilizing routes and methods established by drug and alien smugglers. The U.S. Government’s various homeland security missions are interrelated, and, therefore, improved counterdrug efforts will contribute to greater security against other homeland security threats.

The President’s *National Drug Control Strategy* seeks to disrupt the illicit drug industry as close to the source as possible. As a companion to the *National Drug Control Strategy*, this Strategy directs U.S. efforts to intercept drug shipments that manage to evade the robust international counterdrug efforts in the source zone and transit zone, thereby contributing to a layered defense of the homeland.

This Strategy aims to improve Federal counterdrug efforts on the Southwest Border in the following areas: intelligence collection and information sharing, interdiction at and between ports of entry, aerial surveillance and interdiction of smuggling aircraft, investigations and prosecutions, countering financial crime, and cooperation with Mexico.

Guided by a classified version of this Strategy, as well as a classified Implementation Plan drafted by an interagency working group chaired by the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Counternarcotics Enforcement (DHS/CNE), and the Department of Justice, Office of the Deputy Attorney General (DOJ/ODAG), the United States

Government is committed to rapidly and thoroughly implementing all 68 of the Strategy's objectives, which are incorporated into the seven thematic sections of this document. The implementation process is well on its way. In the summer of 2006, DHS and DOJ brought both policy makers and frontline officials together to build a Strategy implementation plan from the ground up. Over the following year this working group developed a detailed, classified working implementation document laying out the desired end state, estimated resource requirements, action plan, and metrics for each objective of the Strategy. The implementation document guides agencies in formulating budgets, programs, and policies relating to narcotics control on the border. To date 53 of the 68 recommendations are partly or completely implemented. However, there is more work to be done. DHS and DOJ continue to oversee a national implementation effort involving Federal, State, local, and private sector entities. This effort will also coordinate adjustments to the Strategy as new challenges emerge in the rapidly changing security environment on the Southwest Border.

INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION AND INFORMATION SHARING

Every day, the wide array of Federal, State, and local agencies responsible for security in the Southwest Border region collect valuable information about criminal organizations and associated threats to border security. Unfortunately this information is often not adequately compiled, analyzed, and disseminated throughout the intelligence and law enforcement communities. This Strategy seeks to enhance our understanding of drug trafficking and border security threats and to ensure that timely information gets to those who need it.

- Intelligence and law enforcement agencies will conduct both broad strategic assessments of the situation on the Southwest Border as well as detailed studies of the organizations responsible for much of the criminal activity in the area.
- Federal agencies will increase the resources and personnel dedicated to collecting, analyzing, and disseminating intelligence related to drug trafficking and the Southwest Border.
- The Federal law enforcement and intelligence communities will take steps to enhance the integration of the various existing intelligence and operational centers in the Southwest Border region. This will include the enhancement of communications and information sharing systems used by these centers, as well improved processes for sharing information among Federal, State, and local authorities.
- U.S. agencies will work through existing bilateral forums to improve the sharing of actionable information, as appropriate, with their Mexican counterparts.

AT THE PORTS OF ENTRY

Despite the tireless efforts of U.S. border security personnel, large quantities of drugs continue to be smuggled through the dozens of legitimate ports of entry on the Southwest Border. Current efforts at the ports of entry aimed at countering terrorism, weapons smuggling, and human trafficking will also contribute to the increased interdiction of

illegal drugs. This Strategy outlines further improvements that will increase security against drug trafficking while minimizing the disruption of legitimate travel.

- The Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, will increase the resources devoted to drug interdiction at ports of entry, to include both ground-breaking technology and time-tested tactics, such as the use of K-9 units.
- Federal agencies will work with one another, their Mexican counterparts, and the private sector to increase the use of advance information to screen vehicles and cargo. This information will allow U.S. Customs and Border Protection to most effectively distinguish the relatively small number of suspect vehicles and shipments from the much larger flow of legitimate travel and commerce.

BETWEEN THE PORTS OF ENTRY

The vast expanses of land between U.S. ports of entry pose serious challenges to law enforcement and border security efforts. Criminal organizations exploit this challenging environment to move contraband of all kinds across the Southwest Border. In order to secure the border in the vulnerable areas between ports of entry, the Department of Homeland Security has developed the Secure Border Initiative (SBI). The enhancements to staffing, technology, and border infrastructure implemented under SBI will contribute significantly to the counterdrug mission. The *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* builds on this effort to further reduce the threat of drug trafficking between ports of entry.

- The U.S. Border Patrol will increase its operational capabilities at the Southwest Border by increasing personnel and improving access to key information for those in the field.
- Federal agencies will increase their cooperation with one another and with State and local entities to expand the reach and effectiveness of border law enforcement operations.
- Lessons learned from earlier initiatives will be documented and used in the development of future interagency border law enforcement operations.

AIR

The airspace over the Southwest Border provides opportunities to those seeking to exploit the border as well as those seeking to secure it. Criminals can use clandestine aircraft to smuggle illicit narcotics and other dangerous cargo into the United States, while law enforcement authorities can make use of air assets to optimize surveillance and response. The Strategy seeks to eliminate air travel's utility to criminals and maximize its utility to law enforcement and border security entities.

- Federal agencies will enhance aerial detection and response capabilities along the border through increased staffing, enhanced technology, and the integration of additional air assets to expand and expedite responses to intrusions.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Air and Marine Operations, will work with other Federal agencies to enhance surveillance technologies and develop a common operating picture of the air situation on the Southwest Border.

- U.S. agencies will increase cooperation with their Mexican counterparts through the exchange of liaison officers and increased information sharing.

INVESTIGATIONS AND PROSECUTIONS

Trafficking organizations along the Southwest Border now dominate the illicit drug trade and are largely responsible for the violence that is plaguing many border communities. Given the magnitude of the threat, it is imperative that the law enforcement and intelligence communities in the United States and Mexico closely coordinate efforts to disrupt the organizations responsible for the movement of illicit drugs, proceeds, and weapons across the Southwest Border and to bring their leaders to justice.

- U.S. law enforcement agencies will increase the focus of personnel and resources on the Southwest Border, to include investigations into the finances of drug trafficking organizations.
- Federal agencies will enhance intelligence support to U.S. investigations, and will take steps to improve the dissemination of key information to the law enforcement community.
- The Department of Justice will increase the capacity of Federal prosecutors to pursue Southwest Border drug trafficking cases.
- Federal agencies will target corruption on the U.S. side of the border by increasing the number of investigators and employing sophisticated investigative techniques.

MONEY

The sale of billions of dollars worth of illegal drugs in the United States generates bulk cash that, taken together, weighs millions of pounds. The effective implementation of the Bank Secrecy Act (BSA) and the Patriot Act has helped to restrict the placement of drug proceeds directly into the U.S. financial system. Criminal organizations are now forced to move these large quantities of bulk cash across the Southwest Border and into Mexico. The Strategy seeks to target this key vulnerability and deprive traffickers of the profits that motivate their criminal activity.

- Federal agencies will seek to stem the flow of bulk cash out of the United States and into Mexico by enhancing mechanisms to share information from bulk cash seizures, investing in new detection technologies, expanding training on bulk cash detection, and conducting operations to interdict bulk cash shipments leaving the United States.
- The United States will target suspect money services business (MSBs) such as money transmitters, currency exchanges, and check-cashing businesses that may be involved in money laundering operations on the Southwest Border.
- The Department of the Treasury will employ targeted financial sanctions such as those provided in the Kingpin Act and the Patriot Act to disable the financial infrastructure of drug trafficking organizations.

MEXICO

While many of the initiatives detailed in the Strategy rely on effective cooperation with our neighbor to the South, this plan would be incomplete without a dedicated discussion of the robust counterdrug relationship between the United States and Mexico. Mexico successfully eradicates most of its illegal opium and marijuana crops each year. Mexican authorities have worked with the international community to counter the threat of methamphetamine production and trafficking and have effectively cracked down on the importation of the chemicals used to produce the drug. President Felipe Calderon's recent aggressive actions against drug trafficking organizations have sent a strong and promising signal that bodes well for continued cooperation. This cooperation will be enhanced by several Mexico-specific initiatives laid out in the *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy*.

- The United States will assist Mexico in deploying effective counter-smuggling technology.
- U.S. agencies will work with Mexican counterparts to coordinate efforts to counter methamphetamine and precursor chemical trafficking. The two governments will work together in international forums to improve the control of precursor chemical shipments.
- The United States is assisting Mexico in the establishment of a command, control, and intelligence center that will improve coordination among the various Mexican counterdrug agencies.
- At both the national and the local levels, U.S. authorities will increase their interaction and cooperation with Mexican counterparts to address the drug trafficking threat along the shared border.