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**United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Office of Inspector General**

Report of Inspection

In the National Interest: Diplomatic Transformation on our Southern Border

Report Number ISP-I-07-02, October 2006

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KEY JUDGMENTS

- Cross-border problems have a direct impact on U.S. business interests, environmental safety, quality of life, and border security. The U.S. embassy in Mexico and the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) emphasize border issues in their strategic plans. However, neither has dedicated sufficient staff or attention to the coordination of those issues. Border posts need additional positions to allow them to focus on solving the problems.
- Due to the complexity and labor-intensive nature of visa and passport processing in the post-September 11, 2001, environment, consular personnel at the border are fully engaged in carrying out statutory consular responsibilities. Assigning nonconsular reporting and outreach responsibilities to consular officers cannot and should not be considered a substitute for an adequately staffed political, economic, management, or public diplomacy section.
- With looming increases in consular workload and in demands on consular resources over the next five years, there is a need to address nonconsular issues and their priority in the operations of the border posts. If nonconsular issues are not properly managed now, it will be impossible to do so once the wave of U.S. passport and nonimmigrant visa applications hits the border.
- The decision to assign regional security officers (RSOs) to each border consulate has improved the security of the consulates and enhanced the coordination of cross-border law enforcement issues that in turn affect bilateral commercial development.

The management review took place in Washington, DC, between June 26 and July 18, 2006, and in Mexico City and the border region between July 19 and August 11, 2006. Leslie Gerson (team leader), Larry Colbert (deputy team leader), Bernard Alter, John Jones, Carl Troy, and Bill Whitman conducted the review.

CONTEXT

The U.S. diplomatic mission in Mexico consists of one of the largest embassies in the world, nine consulates or consulates general, and 13 consular agencies. The latter are limited to providing a range of emergency and nonemergency services to Americans resident or traveling in Mexico. The other nine constituent posts, however, manage an impressive array of commercial, law enforcement, consular, cultural, environmental, and outreach activities, even though in many cases they were established primarily to issue visas and protect American citizens. With the signing and implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the tightening of cross-border processing following September 11, 2001, the five border consulates have broadened their responsibilities as advocates for U.S. interests and as liaison between Mexican and U.S. authorities on both sides of a sometimes divisive border. These wider responsibilities have become an integral part of mission Mexico's strategic plan.

Mexico's FY 2008 Mission Performance Plan (MPP) identifies important goals and initiatives on border infrastructure, immigration and customs procedures, information sharing, the manufacturing sector, cross-border water and pollution issues, and border outreach. Mexico is the second largest trading partner to the United States, and its just-in-time deliveries to and from the United States are vital to important sectors of the U.S. economy. The Ciudad Juarez-El Paso metropolitan area is the third largest industrial center in North America after Chicago and Los Angeles. Nuevo Laredo/Laredo is the largest commercial gateway between the two countries, with some 7,000 trucks crossing through its ports of entry each day. Fifty percent of all North America's imports of fresh produce enter the United States through Nogales on the way from Mexico to the United States and Canada. Mexico provides more legal visitors to the United States than any country in the world; many of those visitors cross the border several times each day for work, shopping, school, and community activities. Bilateral issues involving trade, migration, and security focus on the border region.

The scope of work at the five Mexican border consulates is unlike that of other diplomatic missions around the world, with the possible exception of the Canadian posts on the northern border. On both frontiers, the diplomatic posts serve constituencies that stretch far into the continental United States. Twin communities spanning the border share social, economic, environmental, and cultural priorities. Federal, state, and local government officials, law enforcement and emergency pre-

paredness personnel, as well as agricultural, manufacturing, and transport interests on both sides of the border interact on a daily basis to resolve real problems affecting their mutual interests in real time. Unlike Canada, Mexico is often unable to bring equal financial resources and a well-developed infrastructure to the partnership, complicating joint efforts to resolve problems. The U.S. consulates on the Mexican border, together with the Mexican consulates on the U.S. side, manage a diplomatically agreed border liaison mechanism (BLM)—a bilateral process involving multiple players—to address those shared issues.

As they address these important issues, the border consulates stand alone. The geography and economic history of Mexico have discouraged east-west links, including road and air systems, so that it is difficult for larger border consulates like Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez to cover issues for the smaller posts nearby. Air connections between Mexico City and some of the border posts are arduous and infrequent. A trip between Nogales and Tijuana involves either a transfer in Houston, Dallas, or Phoenix or an eight-hour car ride through sparsely populated desert. Slightly larger consulates a few hours south of the border with some regional responsibility—Monterrey in the east and Hermosillo in the west—admit to being unreliable resources for the border posts in a time of crisis due to the long travel times.

The U.S. mission in Mexico has approximately 334 Department of State (Department) U.S. citizen direct-hire positions allocated to the embassy and the nine constituent posts. There are an additional 296 U.S. direct-hire positions allocated to other agencies working in Mexico in support of the mission's goals.¹ Of that total, the Department has only 16 U.S. direct-hire assets working full time on nonconsular issues on the border, and the majority of those officers are involved with resource management.²

The inspection team's program focused on the ability of the border consulates to identify, address, coordinate, and resolve nonconsular issues in today's political, security, and economic climate. Team members consulted a variety of government and nongovernment interlocutors both in Mexico City and at constituent posts in Monterrey, Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, Nogales, Matamoros, and Nuevo Laredo. They also interviewed the principal officer from Hermosillo. The team examined nonconsular staffing, the use of consular resources to fill nonconsular functions, and the support and guidance from both the embassy and the Department in this effort.

¹Only 230 of the 334 Department of State positions and 198 of the 296 other agency positions were encumbered at the time of this review.

²Information technology, general services, and human resources.

MANAGEMENT REVIEW

THE BORDER CROSSING: THE CRUX OF THE PROBLEM

As subsequent sections of this report will demonstrate, the border crossing process overshadows virtually every interaction that the border consulates undertake. The principal officers receive complaints regularly about the loss of fresh produce, delays in the arrival of freight to U.S. businesses, air quality degradation as a result of idling diesel engines in hours-long queues, and the negative impact of the crossing process on tourism and commerce on both sides of the border. Although the principal officers are not in charge of the process, they can bring interests on both sides of the border together to address funding, personnel, and procedural questions as well as prepare the embassy or the Department for intervention at higher levels when necessary. Their ability to assess the scope of the problem, identify the resources available to address the problem, and enlist bilateral participation in problem solving is constrained by the fact that at most of the consulates there is generally only one person--the principal officer--not dedicated to either the provision of statutorily mandated consular services or to the administration of the post's physical and personnel resources. These resource issues and the attributes required of a successful principal officer will be discussed later in the report.

The Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection (DHS/CBP) agency has responsibility for the management of the ports of entry. Port directors have established productive relationships with the communities that depend on efficient border crossings for their security, livelihoods, and well being. These border communities or entities sometimes submit proposals for new and expanded crossings to facilitate both commuter and cargo traffic in a secure environment with the latest technologies. Before any of these projects can be initiated, however, a Presidential permit--essentially federal permission to build a crossing--needs to be issued. The Department is the federal entity with authority to issue these permits and coordinates the process through WHA's Mexico desk (WHA/MEX). Issuance of a Presidential permit involves a complex application process and the concurrence of numerous government agencies once the application has been submitted, which makes delays inevitable.

The situation in Tijuana is illustrative of the impact of border crossing wait times and the urgency of improving border crossings. The border crossing between Tijuana and San Diego is the busiest crossing in the world, accounting for 17 percent of all land border crossings into the United States each year. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) estimates that waiting times for freight crossing into San Diego range from two and a half to eight hours. SANDAG further estimates the resultant losses to the California economy alone at \$3.6 billion annually and at \$7.6 billion to the United States in general. Costs to Mexico, our second largest trading partner, amount to \$11 billion each year. Economic losses come in several forms: spoilage of perishable goods, failure to meet production deadlines on just-in-time orders, and work hours lost idling in lines by managers and transport personnel alike. But there are less obvious, yet equally important, economic losses when manufacturers move their production operations overseas rather than deal with border wait times—a trend that began several years ago. Manufacturing plants in Mexico import primary ingredients from the United States; the closure of those plants has a direct impact on the businesses that produce the primary ingredients in the United States. Recently, the manufacturing industry along the border has begun to see resurgence, with manufacturers returning to North America, but continued growth depends in large part on the ability to transport the finished products back to the United States by train or truck with minimal delays.

Although SANDAG has not analyzed the numbers border-wide, representatives from business groups, think tanks, and DHS/CBP all along the border raised their concerns with team members over wait times, the impact on economic activity, and overall security. Even if SANDAG's estimates are high, it is certain that the lost economic benefits resulting from border crossing delays along the two thousand mile long U.S.-Mexican border are substantial.

Any interagency process can be complicated and take months or years to conclude; the Presidential permit process is no exception. For most projects, once the application has been submitted to the Department, it takes a year or more before the permit is issued. WHA/MEX had two permits pending at the time of this review, but the office was aware of several other projects in the gestation phase. Cognizant of the importance of new and expanded border crossings, WHA/MEX has a small unit dedicated to the permit process. The office is involved in two major projects to assist entities seeking to enhance existing crossings gain a better understanding of when a permit may be required: the development of simplified instructions for new permit applications and the development of guidance for Executive Order 13337 (May 5, 2004), which brought land border crossings under the permit process.

Unfortunately WHA/MEX's work on the permit process is not fully understood by many of the civic and commercial interests on the border who tend to want new border crossings built quickly but remain unaware of the complexities inherent in the binational and interagency process. The team discussed with WHA/MEX possible ways to use the principal officers at the border consulates to point potential applicants in the right direction to access correct guidance on the procedures. In some cases, even though no formal Presidential permit application has been submitted, concerned citizens have already begun complaining about the backlogged process—when in fact without an application there is no process to be backlogged. WHA/MEX also plans to increase the frequency of its “Quarterly Border Reports” to advise the border principal officers of progress on pending permits and give them useful information for interacting with interested parties contemplating permit requests.

Once the Presidential permit application has been submitted, new delays often arise because multiple offices within the responsible agencies may need to review and approve each application. Periodic high-level meetings with representatives of each key agency are essential to establish priorities for project consideration and achieve consensus on the importance of a speedy process. There is no mechanism to keep the embassy, constituent posts, DHS/CBP, and interested commercial and civic groups advised on the status of permit applications to help them make informed decisions on investments, timetables, and resources. A page on the bureau's web site may be useful in publicizing this information.

Recommendation 1: The Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs should create a mechanism to advise interested federal, state, and local governments, as well as business groups, of the status of the Presidential permit applications. (Action: WHA)

The team made an informal recommendation to WHA urging the bureau's leadership to push more forcefully for interagency attention to projects delayed by the Presidential permit process and establish priorities for the several proposals awaiting action.

The embassy's narcotics affairs section (NAS) shows how Department assets can successfully address border-crossing problems. When Mexican resources are insufficient to fund corresponding infrastructure improvements on the Mexican side of the border, NAS has occasionally been able to fund road and infrastructure work in Mexico related to the opening of Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (otherwise known as SENTRI) lanes. Tijuana is illustrative of the situa-

tion. A contemplated increase in the number of lanes northward would permit CBP officers to conduct a security name check on a greater number of automobile passengers without creating additional wait times so devastating to commercial interests. That improvement, however, will require infrastructure expansion on the Mexican side that Baja California Norte state may not be able to fund. NAS assistance on projects like this one in other locations has been instrumental in speeding the crossing of bona fide travelers and allowing CBP resources to focus on detection and prevention of mala fide travelers.

CONSULAR WORKLOAD AND STAFFING

Mexican posts processed over 1.3 million applications for nonimmigrant visas during FY 2005, three times more than its closest peer, the U.S. embassy in Korea. During the same year, Mexico's only immigrant visa unit, located in Ciudad Juarez, processed over 56,000 applications, 20,000 applications more than the second highest volume post, Manila. An estimated 900,000 Americans are on record annually as either residing in Mexico or passing through as tourists. Finally, according to the FY 2005 consular packages, Mexico had 1,526 Americans arrested and 729 detained, the largest number of any U.S. mission.

The seven consulates in northern Mexico affected by border issues, Ciudad Juarez, Matamoros, Nogales, Nuevo Laredo, and Tijuana as well as Hermosillo and Monterrey, which are not located directly on the border but still have responsibilities for some border activities, bear the brunt of that workload. These posts account for approximately 55 percent of all Mexican nonimmigrant visa applications processed, 100 percent of all immigrant visas, 72 percent of all recorded U.S. residents and tourists, 82 percent of all reported arrest cases, and 81 percent of all U.S. citizens detained in Mexico. The Bureau of Consular Affairs estimates that the border posts alone deal with more than 20 percent of all Americans arrested around the world.

To handle the demand for services, the seven consular sections have more than 50 percent of all Foreign Service officers and about 40 percent of all locally employed staff in the country. On the ground, these statistics mean that consular section officers form the largest single group of available personnel at each post. In addition, with the implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which will require all U.S. citizens seeking to enter the United States from Mexico to present a U.S. government-issued travel document, and the coming tidal wave of four to six million visa applicants seeking to renew their soon-to-be-expired ten year border crossing cards, the size and complexity of the consular operations at the border posts will increase significantly in the future.

Although the posts would appear to be adequately staffed to carry out their current consular responsibilities, owing to the added complexity and the highly labor intensive nature of visa and passport processing in the post-September 11, 2001, environment, this is not the case. The extra steps needed to process visa applicants, such as eliminating group interviews for guest workers, sending applicants with an arrest for driving under the influence to be medically evaluated, or fingerprinting applicants listed in the visa lookout data base, have stretched the current consular staffing to its limits and led to long waits for visa interviews at many Mexican posts. Because of the close social, economic, and cultural relationships that tie the various border communities together, any consular mistakes either in regards to visa adjudication or protecting U.S. citizens can quickly develop into very public bilateral issues. The intense spotlight on consular activity on the border places a premium on quality, unhurried decision making.

Some principal officers, caught between the need to carry out their consular responsibilities and the need to answer nonconsular demands, have sought to involve the consular section in the broader range of bilateral issues through the use of a “portfolio” system. Entry-level officers (ELOs) in the consular sections are given the chance to take on an extra responsibility or portfolio, such as following a specific political, economic, public diplomacy, or management issue, as long as it does not prevent the efficient delivery of consular services. Although the portfolio system is a useful supplement to a post’s regular reporting program and provides good opportunities for broader experience to new officers, it should not be used in place of an adequately staffed political, economic, management, or public diplomacy section.

THE ROLE OF THE EMBASSY

Embassy Mexico City highlights a wide range of border issues in its strategic planning, but it does not have an efficient system in place to communicate with the consulates, review their nonconsular priorities, and provide them the support they require when sustained high-level intervention is required to advance important goals. The minister counselor for consular affairs (MCCA), who is always one of the Bureau of Consular Affairs’ most experienced officers, coordinates all consular operations countrywide. Principal officers and consular section chiefs are clear on the MCCA’s oversight and coordination responsibilities and have a single point of contact for all questions relating to the funding and management of consular services. Because of the preponderance of consular resources and issues at the constituent posts, the MCCA has always been the rating officer for the principal officers. Although the embassy has made efforts to supplement the MCCA’s role in border

post management with designated border officers from other sections of the embassy, notably the political section, the coordination and oversight of nonconsular issues has been inconsistent.

In November 2005, an embassy telegram, “Mexican Border Staffing: Time for a New Look,” highlighted the evolving role of the border consulates and the lack of staff to implement important border security goals. The inspection team agrees that each border consulate needs at least one additional officer to cover border affairs (see recommendation in the border liaison section of the report). The recent creation of RSO positions for each post will also help advance the vital border security agenda; the RSOs in Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana have already made a real difference in outreach to law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border. Even with additional staffing, however, principal officers cannot be left to forage for resources on important issues. Although the annual principal officers conference is a valuable coordination and communication tool, a yearly conference cannot replace systematic, targeted, and regular liaison with and among the border consulates. The consulates do good work, but the embassy is not always aware of their accomplishments or the myriad opportunities they forego due to limited resources--resources that might be better marshaled or prioritized through regular discussions with the embassy.

A small border working group of senior Department representatives from each embassy section would be both a useful resource for the principal officers and a nonconsular resource for the MCCA. If such a group communicated regularly with the border principal officers and focused the discussions on best practices and shared problems, this would go far to providing guidance and ensuring coordination of the nonconsular activities. Consulates should be aware of embassy priorities for reporting and outreach so that they can be proactive; similarly the embassy needs to be aware of the consulates’ urgent problems on the commercial, environmental, interagency, and security fronts that require their action, up to and including ambassadorial and deputy chief of mission involvement. In addition, a working group would ensure that any taskings to or from the consulates are prioritized and take into account available resources. Existing digital videoconferencing and teleconferencing capabilities are ideal for this type of regular communication. Representatives from other agencies and WHA/MEX should be included in these conferences as appropriate.

Recommendation 2: Embassy Mexico City should designate a senior member of each Department of State section to serve on a border working group that will communicate regularly with the five principal officers of the border posts. (Action: Embassy Mexico City)

Periodic digital videoconferences or teleconferences with all principal officers, not just the five border principal officers, are, of course, also encouraged. The deputy chief of mission's active participation in the border working group sessions would emphasize the importance of the border issues and focus this new coordination effort. During the review, senior embassy management expressed enthusiasm over increasing the mission's coordination of border activities, which bodes well for success.

Because neither the embassy's section chiefs and agency heads nor the consulates' principal officers routinely share their daily meeting schedules, they lose the synergy that can result from this type of information sharing. For example, embassy staff could be meeting with a Mexican counterpart who plays a role in the border agenda, but the border consulate loses a chance to have an important issue raised by an embassy officer because the consulate is unaware that the meeting is scheduled and vice versa.

The consulates do prepare a consolidated monthly activity report for the embassy, but an Office of Inspector General (OIG) team review of a handful of these reports suggests that these discuss only major meetings and events -and only after they have taken place. The embassy then sends the consulates minutes from each internal meeting, including the country team and law enforcement working group meetings. These are worthy initiatives. Sharing calendars and updating them on a web site would give an even broader picture of the range of activities at the consulates, permit better collaboration, and facilitate the integration of consulate issues into embassy priorities. The team made an informal recommendation about the sharing and regular updating of daily calendars.

Increased travel to the border by senior embassy officers to spearhead key BLM meetings, conduct outreach on recurring regional issues, and provide on-the-ground coordination of thorny cross-border issues could stimulate action on the border agenda. During this management review, several senior embassy officers expressed interest in being part of an enhanced targeting of border issues. The team encouraged this effort as part of a multifaceted border strategy.

NONTRADITIONAL BORDER DIPLOMACY

Although a better approach to traditional Foreign Service reporting is clearly indicated at all border posts, a successful program also requires a nontraditional, highly proactive program for resolving the many complex and unique nonconsular problems that occur constantly along the border. Unlike problems that arise at most

other Foreign Service posts, cross-border local issues and activities have an immediate impact on U.S. citizens, their business interests, environmental safety, quality of life, and border security. As mentioned earlier, the consular districts of these border posts extend well into the United States because many states and communities on or near the border look to the consulates for problem-solving approaches and other assistance in dealing with their Mexican counterparts on a wide range of issues. For example, the consulate in Nogales has established a close and productive relationship with Arizona officials, including the governor. To be successful, officers assigned to border consulates therefore must take a distinctly nontraditional, highly operational, and much more expansive approach to their responsibilities than their colleagues in other posts around the world.

Much of this work could be carried out through substantial officer participation in, and reporting on, the work of the local BLMs and in taking a lead role in advancing the operational work of the BLMs' specialized subgroups. For example, economic-commercial work along the border, instead of focusing merely on traditional export promotion programs, also involves working with American business and local authorities to facilitate cross-border freight shipments to and from the Mexican manufacturing or assembly industries. The costs of these delays to the local and national economies of both countries are outlined in an earlier section of this report.

The team met with energetic, engaged business groups and chambers of commerce that deal with business conditions on both sides of the border; consulate representation at their action group meetings is essential if the consulate is to keep abreast of commercial issues and play a role in problem resolution. At present, the principal officers cannot participate in or report on the full range of border initiatives that play directly into the secure and stable markets and environmental goals contained in the mission's strategic plan. Nor are the consulates able to do the type of reporting on labor issues in the manufacturing sector that the Department and the embassy have proposed. After consulting with the OIG team, the embassy decided to reprogram a political officer position to the consulate general in Ciudad Juarez during the current assignment cycle. This initiative represents an important first step in filling reporting and resource gaps along the border. (See Recommendation 6.)

Because of the impact on neighboring U.S. communities, the border consulates are called on to track and implement measures that reduce cross-border pollution. The team found little evidence that either the embassy's environment, science, and technology section or the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regional office in San Francisco had established a meaningful presence along the border. Examples of pollution affecting U.S. communities are rife, ranging from industrial dumpsites in

Mexico near Matamoros, to spills of sulphuric acid in streams flowing into Arizona and the exhaust emissions of idling trucks tied up in formalities all along the border. In the case of Tijuana, which daily pours 13 million gallons of wastewater into the local river which then flows into the Pacific ocean, team members heard complaints in San Diego that the United States and Mexico have not taken adequate steps to resolve this issue. While the consulate general in Tijuana cannot resolve this long-standing issue, it should be reporting on a subject of intense interest to both sides of the border. The team recommended, and the embassy concurred, in the repositioning of one of its environment, science, and technology positions to Tijuana where health, pollution, water, and other environmental issues will get much-needed attention. (See Recommendation 6.)

REPORTING

Except in Monterrey, which is not geographically a border post but does have some regional responsibility for two posts--Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros--that are on the border, none of the posts visited has an economic, political, or commercial Department position, other than the principal officer who fills an interfunctional role. Although principal officers at the border consulates provide some political and economic reporting, the bulk of these activities falls to the ELOs who, time permitting, are assigned portfolios of locally important reporting topics.

The principal officers on the border are well aware of the variety and complexity of issues on both sides of the border that demand their attention. They are also conscious of their responsibility to develop the skills of their ELOs. In their effort to develop meaningful portfolios for consular ELOs during their noninterview hours, a number of principal officers have proposed areas of potential reporting for the consular ELOs at their posts. Although the embassy's economic section has provided the constituent posts a list of reporting targets, other sections have not reached out to the posts in the same way. It is important that the embassy and consulates work together to develop a list of subjects suitable for a spot or ad hoc reporting program.

Recommendation 3: Embassy Mexico City should develop, in collaboration with the constituent consulates, a reporting and advocacy plan that focuses on both micro and macro border issues. (Action: Embassy Mexico City)

In view of the high levels of consular activity at the border posts, however, ELOs have little time to perform the kind of reporting and representational work the post needs to advance locally important goals and broader mission objectives. It

is questionable whether, in view of the need to reduce already long and lengthening visa wait times, already hard-pressed ELO resources can or should regularly be used for nonconsular activities. The team also found that border post reporting is generally thin, focusing on after-action reports of crises, minutes of BLM meetings, or administrative requests. This situation would be improved by the addition of one experienced mid-level officer at each border post and also by the intra-embassy guidance and feedback that would flow from an embassy border working group. (See recommendations 4 and 6.)

The Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) acknowledged that commercial coverage along the border is inadequate. It is limited largely to the three locally employed staff positions in Tijuana funded out of the San Diego office of the Department of Commerce and the two FCS officers assigned to Monterrey, who ostensibly carry out border-wide responsibilities, but who have no travel budget. FCS itself acknowledges the high demand for commercial services along the Texas and Arizona borders and is seeking alternatives for staffing the commercial function in that region.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

As with other responsibilities and activities described above, the border consulates' public diplomacy activities are often nontraditional in nature. Their constituency of academics, civic leaders, nongovernmental organizations, media representatives, and the public at large, resides on both sides of the border. Besides speakers' programs and events that introduce Mexican audiences to American musicians and artists, the MPP has also emphasized activities that promote civic culture and professionalism in Mexico's emerging civil society, such as creating a professional and impartial civil service, establishing accountability from public office holders, and training local journalists in ethics and impartial investigative techniques. The ease of securing experts in these fields from nearby U.S. communities and in taking Mexican participants a short distance north for on-the-job shadowing has made these programs particularly effective. Other successful border-specific exchange programs have successfully brought journalists and academics from the United States and Mexico into contact with one another, thus cementing long-term professional relationships.

Embassy Mexico's public affairs section (PAS) has nine Foreign Service officers and 30 locally employed staff positions. Section management notes that some 50 percent of its public affairs activities and 30 percent of its cultural affairs activities overall are devoted to the U.S.-Mexican border region. Due to scarce human and

financial resources, the mission has elected to centralize many of these activities at the embassy to achieve economies of scale, but it acknowledges this still does not provide for the optimal, proactive outreach it desires.

Along the border itself, PAS human resources are limited: Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, and Monterrey each have only a single mid-level public diplomacy officer and only a very limited number of local staff dedicated to PAS functions. In Nogales, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros, the principal officers are the only officers handling these activities, with occasional help from local staff working in other sections and as-needed participation from consular ELOs. Absent dedicated reporting officers at Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana, the locally employed staff positions in PAS maintain the institutional memory and contacts while also serving as de facto reporting officers on a wide range of economic, social, and environmental issues.

In contrast, counterpart Mexican consulates in U.S. border cities all have at least one designated press attaché plus additional individuals whose portfolios include cultural and social issues. This more robust staffing allows the Mexican side to react to border incidents more quickly. They can thus frame the local debate on inflammatory issues including border violence and play a more active role in fostering cross-border civic relationships. As an example, the Mexican consulate general in El Paso recently sponsored a cultural exhibition featuring U.S. artists. Consulate General Ciudad Juarez was invited to reciprocate in hosting the same art works on the Mexican side of the border but was unable to do so, largely due to lack of staffing. The non-PAS posts are even less able to respond to real-time challenges and opportunities. In Nogales, the consular local staff designated to handle press and cultural issues serves primarily as the consular subcashier and is the senior local staff member in the American citizens services unit, where emergency cases must take precedence. Additional PAS staffing in posts currently without such a presence will allow for more initiative in developing and carrying out programs with a local focus.

Another challenge to providing rapid and effective responses to sudden, unexpected events along the border, such as the several incidents around Nogales where CBP personnel were attacked by rocks or gunfire, is the need for the non-PAS posts to coordinate media responses with their supervisory PAS post. Nogales reports to Tijuana; Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros report to Monterrey. Depending on the specific issue, it may even be necessary for the supervisory PAS post to seek clearance from the PAS in Mexico City before any guidance can be issued. Although the border posts claimed general understanding of what required advance clearance and what could be handled locally, the embassy expressed some concern that posts had occasionally responded without sufficient central guidance. A dedicated local staff member in those consulates without a PAS section would allow for a less hierarchical operation and do much to ensure more nimble responses.

Recommendation 4: Embassy Mexico City should either reprogram three locally employed public affairs staff positions from within Mexico to the consulates in Nogales, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros or request the Bureau of Public Affairs and the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, to create and fund three new public diplomacy locally employed staff positions for those three consulates to handle public diplomacy as well as activities relating to border liaison. (Action: Embassy Mexico City, in coordination with PA and WHA)

All of the border posts have digital videoconferencing and teleconferencing equipment. At the PAS posts, this equipment is maintained and operated by PAS staff; at non-PAS posts, slightly different hardware is maintained and operated on an ad hoc basis. Use of this technology is particularly effective in PAS-hosted fora such as one observed by a team member in Mexico City that gave local journalists the opportunity to question senior U.S.-based CBP and National Guard officials on border law enforcement issues. At present, use of the equipment in Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana is constrained by less than optimal conference space, but ultimately these problems will be resolved with the construction of new consulate office buildings. Border posts could use these capabilities more frequently for PAS initiatives and for lateral coordination among principal officers, PAS, consular staff in other posts, the embassy, and the Department.

Overall, the inspection team concluded that public diplomacy initiatives are particularly important along the border because of their immediate affect on communities that span the frontier. It was also clear that locally crafted programs are particularly effective in addressing key areas of concern and that additional staffing is crucial to achieving mission and Department public diplomacy goals.

U.S. LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY AND REGIONAL SECURITY OFFICER PRESENCE

September 11, 2001, made border security a priority for all U.S. diplomatic posts. The increased attention given to border issues resulted in a proliferation of law enforcement and security personnel in Mexico City and on the border. DHS's offices of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, and Citizen and Immigration Services have been joined by an expanding Drug Enforcement Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and agencies from the intelligence community—all focused on the border.

The number of personnel actually based along the Mexican side of the border will soon increase substantially. The OIG team also endorses the proposal in the Mexico MPP that calls for a CBP presence at all the U.S. consulates along the border. As resources become available, the team encourages CBP to consider sending officers first to Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana, the two largest border consulates. Although the Federal Bureau of Investigation does not have special agents assigned to the border consulates, it does have border liaison officers in U.S. border towns that spend a substantial portion of their time in Mexico and work closely with the appropriate U.S. consulate. Whether assigned to Mexico or the United States, all of these law enforcement officers strive to develop effective working relationships with their Mexican counterparts at the local, state, and federal levels. They also act as key intermediaries between Mexican law enforcement and the agencies' offices on the other side of the border.

The five U.S. consulates located along the Mexican border have borne the brunt of trying to facilitate this increased activity. On a daily basis, these consulates have been confronted by the need to square the circle of border security and facilitation of goods, services, and people seeking to enter the United States. The lack of regular, institutionalized communication within the U.S. mission discussed elsewhere in this report has also meant that posts have faced the daunting task of trying to sort out these border problems with incomplete information or guidance from the concerned agencies and from the embassy.

Assigning RSOs to Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez has been an unqualified success. As expected, the on-site presence of an RSO has greatly enhanced the security of the posts' personnel and facilities. An unexpected bonus, however, has been the ability of those officers to relate to and communicate with Mexican and U.S. law enforcement professionals located on both sides of the border. Their active involvement in what can best be called security diplomacy has helped ensure that the principal officers are better informed about the activities of law enforcement agencies operating in their consular districts.

Team members were particularly impressed by the imagination and outreach of the RSOs in Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez. They not only established very good relationships with the Mexican authorities but also became valued contacts for U.S. law enforcement at all levels. Further, they created successful Overseas Security Advisory Committees, used by RSOs to educate overseas American businesses on local security conditions, which attracted the strong interest of commercial enterprises in both cross-border communities. In fact, congressional and state staffers from two states told the inspection team in El Paso, which is the U.S. counterpart to Ciudad Juarez on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, that "their RSO" in Ciudad Juarez

should find a way to include U.S. border community participation in the advisory committees--in effect expanding the operations of the Ciudad Juarez Overseas Security Advisory Council to include the U.S. city. The mission is also commended for the plan to add RSOs to Nogales, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros in the very near future and looks forward to the added benefits such officers will bring to the consulates' overall operations.

At two posts, team members heard troubling comments from experienced officers about agency stovepiping of information gathered at the border. The team was impressed by the efforts of one principal officer to discourage the hoarding of information and encourage cooperation among the law enforcement agencies by creating a consulate law enforcement working group that met on a weekly basis. Law enforcement officials who spoke with team members at the post were almost unanimous in citing the working group as a reason for the relative lack of interagency conflict.

Recommendation 5: Embassy Mexico City should instruct consulates with more than one law enforcement agency to establish a law enforcement working group that meets on a regularly scheduled basis and is chaired by the principal officer. (Action: Embassy Mexico City)

THE BORDER LIAISON MECHANISM

The BLMs came into existence in 1993 as the result of a bilateral agreement between the United States and Mexico. The agreement called for the formation of cross-border meetings of federal, state, and local authorities organized and chaired by the U.S. and Mexican principal officers. The meetings were to be alternately held on the American and Mexican side, with each principal officer responsible for inviting his or her compatriots to the meeting. The principal officers were also made responsible for jointly determining the agendas of the meetings.

The rationale behind the decision to create BLMs was the belief that they would enhance cross-border communication, ensure that unique local issues would not be overlooked by the two governments, and a belief that U.S. and Mexican federal, state, and local officials would use the BLMs to address local issues directly without guidance or assistance from the two capitals. Although not foreseen at the beginning, the principal officers also began calling special BLMs to defuse politically sensitive border incidents such as incursions and border shootings. The increasing number of

issues dealt with by the BLM and the corresponding length of its plenary meetings led to the creation of subgroups or baskets, notably on border security and violence, migration and citizen protection issues, bridges and border crossings, and environmental and sociocultural issues.

With few exceptions, U.S. and Mexican officials on the border placed a high value on the BLM process, though many participants commented that the plenary meetings were too long and had too many agenda items. However, even the critics believed the subgroups were useful, commenting that they were more focused and contained less grandstanding by the participants. U.S. and Mexican law enforcement agencies in particular found the smaller meetings to be more useful for operational decision making. One concrete result from the Nuevo Laredo/Laredo subgroup, for example, was the installation of a red phone that now permits coordinated cross-border responses to threats on the bridges between the two cities.

A ranking official in the Mexican branch of the International Boundary and Water Commission said both the U.S. and Mexican branches of the commission were active in the Juarez-El Paso economic development subgroup. He commented that because there was no “symmetry of authorities,” with different levels of government or even different departments often responsible for the same issue, the BLM provided an umbrella under which the different bureaucratic entities could resolve outstanding issues. To assure regular success, however, he felt the U.S. consulates needed a dedicated person to monitor the process. A member of the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality told team members the BLM was their “vehicle of choice” for engaging their Mexican partners and that through the BLM process they have had real solutions. In Nogales, the consulate facilitated a BLM meeting to address the state of Arizona’s concerns about air quality on the border. That group developed a program for agricultural clearance of produce trucks in a warehouse on the Mexican side of the border, reducing the line of idling trucks right at the border and the pollutants affecting the U.S. community downwind of the diesel fumes. Many other issues remain unsolved, but unfortunately the Nogales consulate does not have sufficient resources to support another BLM subgroup.

The BLM process had its critics as well, however. One senior Department officer not on the border described the process as pathetic and full of false promises, and a former U.S. government officer observed that no one in the embassy was responsible for overseeing the process, and therefore no attempt had been made to streamline or standardize it. Although Mexican and U.S. border principal officers saw great value in the BLM overall, the U.S. officers expressed some frustration over what they were called to do with the limited resources they had at hand. One principal officer told team members that his modestly staffed post was expected to host

BLM plenary meetings with each of three counterpart Mexican consulates in the United States and that each meeting required three full workdays of preparation. Yet another principal officer finds her small post paired with five Mexican consulates. A consul general noted that the only personnel available to assist him in attending border liaison meetings were consular officers who already had a full slate of responsibilities. He said that as a consequence the post was regularly losing opportunities to play an active role in resolving key environmental, wastewater, and air pollution issues.

Several experts suggested to the team that the U.S. consulates adopt a program followed by some of their Mexican counterparts and establish border advisory groups that would bring community concerns to the attention of the consulates' leadership. Although such groups would provide valuable insights, organizing these groups would require a great deal of time and effort that would place even greater demands on the posts' small nonconsular staffs.

In contrast to the dearth of U.S. resources available for the border liaison mechanism, several Mexican consulates have at least one officer who is totally dedicated to assisting the principal officer with the BLM process. In addition, the Mexican government sends high-level policy makers to many BLM meetings. Although, the U.S. Ambassador attended a special ceremony in Ciudad Juarez in June 2005 celebrating the tenth anniversary of the BLM process, neither the Department of State nor the embassy in Mexico City sends officials to the regular BLM plenary or subgroup meetings, even when the issues require high level attention such as persistent delays in improving an overburdened border crossing. Whereas the Mexican consulates are in regular contact with each other and the Mexican Foreign Ministry by digital videoconferencing, their U.S. consulate colleagues do not systematically consult with the embassy in Mexico City or each other. Moreover, no senior officer in the U.S. mission is following the entire process or coordinating guidance and feedback to the American BLM participants in the field.

To bring more coherence and organization to the border liaison process, the five consulates along the border each need an additional mid-level Foreign Service officer position dedicated to assisting the principal officer in responding to border incidents, participating in the BLM meetings, designing public outreach programs, and reporting on the full range of border issues. Of these five officer positions, Mexico City has already identified two positions in the embassy for reprogramming to Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, as mentioned earlier. The remaining three could come from non-traditional sources, such as limited appointments of local experts from the academic or nongovernmental organization communities already working along the border on similar issues or from among the contingent of retired Foreign Service officers who

have previously worked on border issues. The OIG team, however, views limited appointments as an interim measure that would buy time until additional permanent positions could be created.

Recommendation 6: Embassy Mexico City, in coordination with the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and the Bureau of Human Resources, should establish a mid-level border affairs officer position at each of the five consulates located on the border. (Action: Embassy Mexico City, in coordination with WHA/EX and DGHR)

THE BORDER PRINCIPAL OFFICER

Although this review proposes some refinements to the way a border consulate does business and interacts with the embassy and the Department, much depends on the skills of the individual principal officer. The team identified some principal officer qualities that, even with more robust staffing and better communications, are essential for a successful border consulate.

Principal officers must have a keen understanding of consular work, even if they are not career consular officers, as the core responsibilities of these consulates are the protection of American citizens and the facilitation of legitimate travel to the United States. Although there are consular section chiefs at each post who provide day-to-day oversight of the consular function, the principal officers are ultimately responsible for all that goes on, ensuring that the consular professionals have the support they need to provide those essential services to the public.

As this report illustrates, however, there is a significant nonconsular component to the border consulate operations. Because the consulates are a considerable distance from the embassy and from one another, a principal officer needs to be comfortable being the public face of the U.S. government. The officer should welcome having an active role in the community, be at ease with public outreach, and seek opportunities to engage leaders on both sides of the border, in both languages. In addition, the officer should be committed to a vigorous representational program as a way of building partnerships along the border. The consulates that are the most successful in managing such border issues are the ones with officers who are open, accessible, and active in the communities on both sides of the border.

Along the border, a diplomat is not assured of finding a Mexican interlocutor who is university educated or a fluent English speaker. The principal officer in

particular should have a high degree of fluency or have demonstrated language acumen that would allow him or her to achieve fluency soon after arriving at post. An FY 2005 OIG inspection report of Embassy Paris noted that the embassy and the regional and functional bureaus had all made a concerted effort to identify outstanding French-speaking extroverts for its one-officer American presence posts, and the effort has paid off with a well-integrated and influential presence in major cities. The Mexican border posts deserve no less.

Finally, the consul or consul general has to be a vocal yet tactful facilitator both inside and outside the post. As consulate staffing increases, whether due to the upcoming visa and passport initiatives or the expanded presence of law enforcement agencies, the officer has to ensure that the embassy and the Department are aware of and responsive to the increased demands to locate and maintain residences, facilitate school transportation, and ensure the security of families. Internally, with each increase in post personnel, the officer also will have to dedicate even more time to counseling, problem resolution, and mentoring. Externally, the officer must coordinate the interests of dozens of governmental and nongovernmental agencies.

CONCLUSION

The team was particularly struck by how the addition of an RSO to Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana had a multiplier effect in those consulates, permitting the principal officers to focus their energies on other important issues without jeopardizing vital security priorities. The recommendations regarding the assignment of an experienced mid-level interfunctional officer and, where not already present, a full-time public diplomacy local staff member at each border post to focus on nonconsular issues should have a similar multiplier effect on commercial, cultural, and environmental issues. Reinforcing those modest staffing proposals with increased coordination from the embassy, especially on border crossings, should go far toward giving border issues the visibility and attention they deserve.

FORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs should create a mechanism to advise interested federal, state, and local governments, as well as business groups, of the status of the Presidential permit applications. (Action: WHA)
- Recommendation 2:** Embassy Mexico City should designate a senior member of each Department of State section to serve on a border working group that will communicate regularly with the five principal officers of the border posts. (Action: Embassy Mexico City)
- Recommendation 3:** Embassy Mexico City should develop, in collaboration with the constituent consulates, a reporting and advocacy plan that focuses on both micro and macro border issues. (Action: Embassy Mexico City)
- Recommendation 4:** Embassy Mexico City should either reprogram three locally employed public affairs staff positions from within Mexico to the consulates in Nogales, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros or request the Bureau of Public Affairs and the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, to create and fund three new public diplomacy locally employed staff positions for those three consulates to handle public diplomacy as well as activities relating to border liaison. (Action: Embassy Mexico City, in coordination with PA and WHA)
- Recommendation 5:** Embassy Mexico City should instruct consulates with more than one law enforcement agency to establish a law enforcement working group that meets on a regularly scheduled basis and is chaired by the principal officer. (Action: Embassy Mexico City)
- Recommendation 6:** Embassy Mexico City, in coordination with the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and the Bureau of Human Resources, should establish a mid-level border affairs officer position at each of the five consulates located on the border. (Action: Embassy Mexico City, in coordination with WHA/EX and DGHR)

INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal recommendations cover operational matters not requiring action by organizations outside the inspected unit and/or the parent regional bureau. Informal recommendations will not be subject to the OIG compliance process. However, any subsequent OIG inspection or on-site compliance review will assess the mission's progress in implementing the informal recommendations.

Any delay in the Presidential permit process can have an adverse effect on the U.S. economy. The permit approval process involves multiple agencies and the clearance process is time consuming.

Informal Recommendation 1: The Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs should identify a senior bureau official to reinvigorate the interagency clearance process, ensure that all agencies are clear on the priority projects, and coordinate a schedule for project approval.

Embassy officers and principal officers from the constituent posts do not exchange calendars of events and meetings in advance, thereby losing opportunities to advance important issues simultaneously in the capital and at the constituent posts.

Informal Recommendation 2: Embassy Mexico City should establish a mechanism for sharing and updating the calendars of section chiefs, agency heads, and principal officers.

No senior officer in the U.S. mission is following the entire process or coordinating guidance and feedback to the American BLM participants in the field.

Informal Recommendation 3: Embassy Mexico City should create a border liaison mechanism web site that the mission, the Department, and other concerned agencies could use to obtain up-to-date information on the timing, agenda, and minutes of border liaison meetings as well as view the status of border liaison mechanism-sponsored projects.

ABBREVIATIONS

BLM	Border Liaison Mechanism
CBP	Customs Border Protection, Department of Homeland Security
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
ELO	Entry-level officer
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FCS	Foreign Commercial Service
MCCA	Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs
MPP	Mission Performance Plan
NAS	Narcotics affairs section
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PAS	Public affairs section
RSO	Regional security officer
SANDAG	San Diego Association of Governments
WHA	Western Hemisphere Affairs, Department of State
WHA/MEX	Western Hemisphere Affairs/Office of Mexican Affairs