

Terrorism via our Southern Border

Hiram Libby

Henley-Putnam School of Strategic Security at National American University

INT 680 – Operational Concepts and Planning

Dr. Willam Gawthrop

March 18, 2023

Introduction

Due to our unstable southern border, the United States is susceptible to a *black swan* event such violence from transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), or an attack by terrorists using the border crisis to infiltrate our nation. The U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) is experiencing a massive surge in encounters with migrants, reaching “levels not seen in more than two decades (Gramlich, 2023)”. The number of migrants arriving via our southern border is overwhelming border cities as well as cities across our nation to the point of threatening the viability of services within our social safety net (ABC News, 2023). Human smuggling groups, including cartels with a history of political violence (Toedte, 2021; Trejo & Ley, 2021) are now in de facto control of the border (Suárez, 2021). The U.S. Department of State describes our southern border as “vulnerable to terrorist transit” (Country reports on terrorism 2020: Mexico, 2020), and the number of apprehensions of those suspected of involvement in terrorism has risen sharply from 3 in 2020 (CBP Enforcement Statistics, 2023) to 169 in 2023 (Factsheet: Final FY23 numbers show worst year at America’s borders – Ever, 2023). Due to these ongoing conditions, a there is an increased chance that the U.S. will suffer a *black swan* event.

This paper describes the vulnerability at our nation’s southern border, discusses root causes, and identifies key forces and driving forces in the situation, and then ranks those forces by both importance and uncertainty. This paper also discusses analysis of the situation in terms of threat network analysis, geospatial analysis, and simulation modeling. Finally, this paper provides information on intelligence targeting and one area of prescriptive analysis.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore a scenario in which adversaries infiltrate terrorists into the U.S. via our nation’s southern border and those terrorists subsequently engage in

terrorism within the U.S., analyze the scenario, including root causes, and then discuss means by which the scenario can be analyzed.

Scope

This paper constructs a scenario using the procedures described In Clark, Seventh Edition, *Intelligence Analysis: A Target Centric Approach*, which prescribes a “momentum”-driven scenario, which extrapolates on current forces and policy choices, and excludes countervailing forces (Clark, 2023, p.332). Thus, the scenario is based on hypothetical future events informed by present circumstances at the southern U.S. border, which is incurring historically high levels of migration, essentially flooding the border with migrants.

Background

The topic is a *black swan* event occurring as an outgrowth of the chaotic migration at the southern U.S. border. The scenario is that entities with nefarious aims will use the current migration crisis as a means by which to infiltrate terrorists into the U.S. where the terrorists will subsequently commit an act or acts of terrorism. The following considerations help define and describe the proposed scenario.

Focal Issue

The focal issue is that entities antagonistic to the U.S. could use the present chaos at the southern border as cover to infiltrate terrorists into the U.S. Should terrorists enter the U.S. and subsequently commit an act of terror, the impact to national security is obviously negative, and the gravity of the impact will depend largely on the scope of the terrorist attack. The higher value the target, the greater the national security impact.

Clark suggests evaluating a hypothetical scenario through the lens of determining what question it might answer (Clark, 2023, p.335). This scenario answers the question “what if an

entity antagonistic to the U.S. were to infiltrate terrorists into our nation and then use them to commit an act or acts of terrorism here?”.

Key forces in the Local Environment

The terminology *local environment*, here, takes on at least two different meanings. The first meaning is the local environment of the southern U.S. border, where the migration crisis is unfolding. The second meaning is the local environment of the eventual act of terrorism that occurs at the hand of the invading terrorists. This paper cannot likely address all of the potential target areas in the U.S. where a terrorist might strike. However, key forces in any such local environment must, by definition, include the terrorists themselves. Presumably, there will be some combination of countervailing forces, such as security, law enforcement, intelligence, public safety, surveillance and countersurveillance.

Other key forces in a local terrorism target environment include criteria for target selection, which often hinge on the entity behind the terrorists attempting to accomplish a specific task. Maximum visibility, maximum impact, symbolism, and likelihood of success play into terrorist planning. All of these are key forces in the local environment where the attack is to take place. Because this scenario explores three different manifestations of this hypothetical terrorist attack, the localities may be somewhat different for each hypothetical attack; for that reason, the key local forces may be different for each.

With that said, the one locality that remains constant throughout all three manifestations is that of the unsecure border. Here, local forces at play include the migrants, those who assist migrants in entering the U.S., whether legally or illegally, and any enforcement efforts by either private persons or public safety entities. An example of such an enforcement *key force* involved in this is the public safety personnel of the State of Texas. With Governor Abbott having made

some recent key decisions derived from Texas's interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, law enforcement in the State of Texas can now enforce federal immigration laws (Abbott, 2024).

Driving Forces

There are several driving forces animating this hypothetical scenario. The primary driving force that would facilitate the entry of terrorists into the U.S. via the southern border is the chaotic condition at the border. There is an evident correlation between the increased level of chaos at the southern U.S. border and a notable increase in the occurrences of suspected terrorists being caught trying to enter the U.S. Since the expiration of Title 42, which significantly slowed immigration during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, immigration numbers have increased substantially; alongside this overall increase in immigration, the number of instances in which suspected terrorists have been apprehended crossing the southern U.S. border has also risen sharply (CBP 2023; Factsheet, 2023).

In this scenario, driving forces specific to each case of the possible attack resulting from terrorists having infiltrated the U.S. via the southern border exist. In the case of hypothetical state-sponsored terrorism on the part of the Chinese, China may wish to distract the U.S. from defending Taiwan should the Chinese decide to invade. In the case of TCOs conducting terrorism, the hypothetical aim would be to gain political advantage in much the way that TCO terrorism has already done in Mexico, the origin nation for many of the TCOs operating at the southern U.S. border. In the case of jihad, the driving force is the will to engage in jihad pursuant to instructions from Islamist clerics in accordance with deeply held religious beliefs.

The Forces Ranked by Importance

The most salient driving force that is impacting immigration is the enforcement posture of the current U.S. presidential administration, which is tasked with enforcement of U.S.

immigration laws. The level to which an enforcement posture can impact immigration is vivid when comparing the enforcement posture of two administrations: the President Biden administration and the President Trump administration. President Trump's administration enacted a very restrictive enforcement stance in terms of immigration; policies such as *Title 42* and the *Remain in Mexico* policy drastically restricted immigration and resulted in fewer instances of migrant encounters of all types. President Biden's administration allowed *Title 42* to expire and did away with the *Remain in Mexico* posture, replacing it with what then-candidate Biden described as a "surge to the border" immigration philosophy (September Houston Democratic Debate Transcript – Third Debate, 2019). The importance of both communicating that US immigration laws will be enforced and securing the border, including the reduction of immigration, cannot be overstated in the context of preventing a terrorist attack in the U.S. resulting from terrorists crossing the U.S. southern border.

The religious mandate to commit jihad is a powerful, consistent, chronic force that drives worldwide jihad against what radical Muslims believe to be a corrupt, infidel west. Jihad has been the motivation for terrorist attacks across the globe and across the span of time. Islamists will continue to wage jihad regardless of any changes to U.S. immigration policy, making jihad a strong driving force for this scenario.

The activity of TCOs along our nation's southern border remains of high importance. TCOs such as the Mexican drug cartels continue to be involved in various criminal activity, some of it violent. TCO activity meshes with the unsecure southern U.S. border in that TCOs are heavily involved in human trafficking, thus exploiting the unsecure border as well as helping to overwhelm our nation's border law enforcement forces.

The infiltration of Chinese nationals across the southern border is of importance. However, comparatively, it is of less importance because the Chinese have other means by which they can infiltrate the U.S. Foreign student programs provide a means by which Chinese nationals can enter the U.S. and then conduct low-level espionage, reconnaissance of our nation's infrastructure, and, hypothetically, conduct acts of terrorism and sabotage should China's interests demand it.

There is another force that is rising in this scenario, and its importance is undetermined as of yet. That is the force of public opposition to the immigration policies presently in place. Widespread support of Governor Abbott's efforts to secure the border have gained momentum. However, the importance of this is unknown, as it is not certain the extent to which this support will expand, nor is it certain what actions a supportive public will take in opposition to the border crisis.

The Forces Ranked by Uncertainty

There is a large degree of uncertainty as to the actions that a public who supports the idea of securing the southern U.S. border would take. Electing politicians who commit to securing the border is a relatively mild action such a populace might undertake. Public protests and the organization of border-centric militia, such as the "Minutemen Project" in the early 2000's (Bush decries border project, 2005) represent elevated actions that the populace might undertake.

The upcoming election, itself, represents an uncertainty in this scenario. It is unknown whether President Biden will retain his office, and it also uncertain how his immigration enforcement strategy might change, if at all, in relation to pressure from the citizenry. Should President Trump win re-election to the White House, it is widely anticipated that his border policies will be largely in line with those he already enacted and enforced during his previous

presidency, but it is uncertain the degree to which he would go to enact additional practices, such as deportation of illegal immigrants already in the country.

It is not certain whether China would infiltrate additional personnel via the southern U.S. border, nor is it certain how those who infiltrate would behave in terms of terrorism. As previously mentioned, China has historically infiltrated Chinese nationals via different means. In theory, these previously infiltrated Chinese nationals, should they be covert terrorists or saboteurs, could commit terrorism irrespective of how they had entered the U.S.

Scenario Logic

The scenario logic is depicted in the table below.

Border remains unsecure, terrorism in the U.S. occurs as a result.	Border remains unsecure, terrorists infiltrate but are thwarted from committing terrorism in the U.S.
• No change in border status • Enforcement of laws remains lax • Terrorists infiltrate the U.S. via the southern border • Those terrorists conduct terrorism in the U.S.	• No change in border status • Enforcement of laws remains lax • Terrorists infiltrate the U.S. via the southern border • Terrorists are thwarted from committing their terrorism
Border becomes secure, terrorism in the U.S. occurs regardless	Border becomes secure, terrorism in the U.S. does not occur.
• U.S. makes drastic changes and secures the southern border. • Enforcement of laws becomes strict • Terrorists have already infiltrated via the southern U.S. border • Those terrorists conduct terrorism in the U.S.	• U.S. makes drastic changes and secures the southern border. • Enforcement of laws becomes strict • Terrorists already here are thwarted from committing their terrorism

Fleshing Out the Scenario

The scenario begins with a border that is unsecure and overrun with migrants from across the world. As thousands of migrants continue to pour into the U.S. in an unrelenting stream, some of them will be willing to commit terrorism here. One category of willing terrorist is the

Chinese state-actor(s), willing to commit terrorism to either distract or hamper the U.S. from intervening in a hypothetical China-Taiwan armed conflict. In another manifestation of this scenario, infiltrating members of TCOs bring their narcoterrorism to the U.S. from Mexico, where they have already shown a propensity for violence to impact political outcomes. In the third manifestation of this scenario, Islamists infiltrate the U.S. via the southern border and commit an act of terrorism in continuation of their ongoing jihad.

Implications of an Expanded Scenario

There are at least two implications arising from the hypothetical scenario, and they are not mutually exclusive. The first implication is that the U.S. should make itself increasingly ready to contend with terrorism within its borders in the near- to mid-term future. The second implication is that the U.S. should find a way to secure the border and dissuade the onslaught of migrants from around the world who are using the southern border to ingress the nation. Even if the U.S. were to secure the border immediately and completely, there is no way to be sure that such terrorists haven't already infiltrated the nation via the southern border. For that reason, the first implication remains important.

There are several leading indicators and signposts for this scenario, some of which may have already occurred. Should the migrants crossing the border start to be comprised of persons from nations that are of special concern, that could indicate a higher likelihood that undesired persons are infiltrating. Should the U.S. learn that such nations are sponsoring or facilitating the migration of such persons, that would also be of concern. Should border law enforcement begin to encounter increased numbers of terrorists or suspected terrorists entering the country, that would also be an indicator that the U.S. is more vulnerable to terrorist attack or that actors could be being placed in locations in the U.S. to carry out an attack.

Key forces in the Local Environment

Political forces impact this scenario from a variety of different aspects. In the U.S., the politics of the southern border are largely split along Conservative (Republican)/Progressive (Democrat) divisions, with Conservatives trying to secure the border and reduce illegal immigration while Progressives trying to keep the border as open as possible. Politics in other nations indicate a desire on the part of various nations to allow migrants free access to and across the border. Mexico, for example, whose second largest source of income is remittances, or money sent back to Mexico from Mexican migrants in the U.S., clearly has a good deal at stake. Other nations from around the world have desired for quite some time to have the ability to ingress into our nation those with nefarious plans, and this border crisis is providing just the means to do so. At least one of those nations, Iran, has a long-standing animosity toward the U.S.; yet another nation, China, is perhaps the U.S.'s largest geo-political foe.

The situation is subject to information manipulation on various fronts. In the U.S., concerned parties have an interest in making the situation seem either more chaotic or less chaotic. In Mexico, the Mexican government and other agencies, such as NGOs, intentionally aid and abet the migration of thousands of migrants, providing items like food, water, maps, and rest stops along the way. It is unknown how much information manipulation is occurring in each of the roughly 150 nations from which these migrants are now comprised.

Social forces that inform this scenario are also at play in various nations. In the U.S., society is split about the migration crisis. Some stand firmly in support of allowing vast numbers of migrants into the nation. Others are vehemently opposed to the idea of any additional immigration until the existing group of illegal immigrants here, which numbers in the millions, can be thoroughly assimilated into society, and undesirable or ineligible immigrants removed to

their source nations. Social forces in migrants' source nations include the various motivators of migrants, including the absence of various freedoms Americans enjoy, greater social constraints on behavior, and the lack of religious freedom.

The U.S. military has had a minor role in this so far. Domestic enforcement of U.S. laws is not generally the job of the military. Thus, while the military has provided support services to migrants and to border law enforcement, it has not taken on any primary enforcement role. Should terrorism occur in the U.S., that could change, however, in a manner similar to what the nation witnessed in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Economic drivers inform the migration portion of this scenario in much the way that they always inform migration. In general, people will seek to migrate to a place where economic conditions are more favorable to them. This economic driver is not unique to the U.S., but it is particularly salient, as our prosperous nation sits immediately to the north of dozens of economically impoverished nations, many of whose inhabitants seek to come to the U.S.

Infrastructure considerations in this scenario are varied. Infrastructure for the migrant trying to gain entry to the U.S. can be modern, such as roads, highways, and bridges, or it can be treacherous or virtually non-existent, such as in the Darien Gap region of Colombia and Panama, or the Sonoran Desert, each of which sees several thousand U.S.-bound migrants yearly. Also influencing this scenario is the infrastructure in the U.S., which could become a terrorist target. One additional important aspect of the U.S. infrastructure is that much of it remains vulnerable to terrorist attack, even more than two decades after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Intractable Key Influences

Several intractable key factors influence the decreased security at the border. Social forces at play in a migrant's nation of origin, such as a migrant household's decision to migrate,

or whether a migrant will decide to continue migration momentum already created by previous pioneers are not under direct U.S. control (Van Hear, Bakewell & Long, 2018, p.929).

Technological factors, such as the inception or improvement of transportation technologies, GPS navigation technologies, and the myriad of other technologies that aid in migration are also largely out of U.S. control.

Some economic factors that influence migration are largely out of U.S. control, at least in the immediate sense, while others are within U.S. control. For instance, the U.S. might be able to have medium- to long-term influence on the economies of migrants' source nations by various means of stimulus and investment, but that is not likely to immediately impact the current wave of immigration exploiting the unsecure border. Economic influences that are more likely to have impact on the border crisis might involve restriction on use of U.S. funding of entitlements that are presently offered to migrants, such as housing, food, medical care, and education. Defunding these entitlements to the extent legally possible would likely dissuade many migrants from coming to the U.S., helping to reduce overall immigration to more manageable numbers.

A brief word about the political forces shaping this issue is in order. A reasonable expectation is that people, including leaders in power, of any given political persuasion support policies that they estimate will be to their benefit. Under the Biden administration, progressives presently have the ability to determine U.S. federal immigration enforcement policy through the executive branch of our government. The current border crisis is an outgrowth of that policy. Whether funding for this current version of immigration enforcement policy retains funding is a matter for the U.S. Congress to take up. Thus, the influence that the executive and the legislative branches exert on this issue form the answer to the inquiry into identifying key factors over which an actor or policymaker could exert influence. As to the question of whether these key

factors have actual impact on the issue, a quick recollection of how the border and immigration enforcement operated under several previous administrations indicates that the impact is substantial.

Inertia, Opposition, Contamination, Feedback, and Synergy.

Examination of the “four common background forces...inertia, opposition, contamination, and feedback (Clark, 2023, pp.283-295)” also informs this analysis. The current inertia at the southern U.S. border that ongoing historically high levels of migration. There is some opposition to this inertia; various state governors have taken actions such as transporting migrants to other states and enabling their own state law enforcement to effect arrests for immigration crimes. This enabling of state law enforcement to enforce federal law might also be considered contamination, in the sense that the newly granted ability could be said to usurp a traditionally federal role. Other contamination of this issue occurs in that the immigration is not organic; it is being assisted by NGOs, transnational criminal organizations and other foreign entities.

Feedback, here, is mixed, and seems to have changed over the course of time. Some who have traditionally supported illegal immigration have recently voiced increasing concern as the effects of the mass migration have had more direct impact on those traditionally supportive areas and people. For instance, mayors of *sanctuary cities* have voiced concern over their difficulties in coping with the unprecedented amounts of migrants arriving in their cities. Other feedback has consistently expressed grave concerns regarding the changes at and near the border itself ever since the changes in immigration policy and enforcement posture took effect.

The synergy that animates the border crisis is comprised of several facets. The *push-pull* of a migrant’s journey and entry into the U.S. is perhaps the most basic synergy involved. The

push is comprised of reasons that migrants leave their homelands, such as poverty, food scarcity, political persecution, or to try to escape their criminal history. The *pull* is comprised of reasons that the migrant chooses to come to the U.S., such as economic opportunity, refuge from persecution, freedom of religion, or simply to join with a support network of family members who have already come here. However, there may be darker *push-pull* factors at play, such as the conduct of espionage, sabotage, or terrorism. This more sinister *push-pull* presents a grave threat to our nation that a black swan event is more likely to occur the longer that we maintain the type of immigration circumstance that we presently have.

Causal Model

The causal model for the immigration-related black swan takes the form of a terrorist event that results from bad actors entering the U.S. via the southern border. Clark's causal model (2023, pp.292-293) calls for four elements: a proper time sequence, unspurious relationship between the independent and dependent variable, covariation, and causality. The time sequence that will culminate in this black swan terrorist attack, concisely, is that terrorists will enter the U.S. via the southern border and subsequently commit terrorism. This will also manifest the unspurious relationship; the terrorists could not have committed the act of terrorism here had they not entered via the southern U.S. border. The covariation is that the event, which is not yet occurring, will, indeed occur as a result of this entry into the U.S. The most proximate causality of the terrorist event will be the terrorists' entry into the U.S. This scenario is subject to a much broader examination, which can be addressed in more detail in further writing.

Threat Network Analysis

The threat network analysis is an appropriate analysis model for this issue. Examination of the issue of a terrorist event in the U.S. as a result of the present immigration policies and

enforcement posture, herein referred to as the *scenario*, requires the examination of multiple aspects. Using the paradigm of seeing the scenario as the procedural goal of a threat network, it becomes evident that the scenario is comprised of precisely the aspects to which Clark refers: “people, processes, places, and material – components that are identifiable, targetable, and exploitable” (U.S. Joint Forces Command, 2011, p.III-1 in Clark, 2023, p.380). Referencing “insurgents, violent global jihadism, and international criminal organizations such as human and narcotics traffickers (Clark, 2023, p.380)” is a good example of just how appropriately this analysis model fits this scenario.

The threat network analysis addresses several political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, and information (PMESII) aspects related to the components of the scenario. Political components include the U.S. government, both major U.S. political parties and many of their elected officials, the government of Mexico, and the various governments potentially involved in the present immigration crisis at our nation’s southern border. The military components involved include various portions of the U.S. military and National Guard, and potentially the Mexican military, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, and various Islamist military and quasi-military organizations. Economic aspects involved, include economic push/pull that inspires migration and also includes the criminal economies involved in human trafficking and TCOs. Social components in the scenario are present in migration’s push/pull, social forces that inspire terrorism, and social currents in the U.S. that either support or oppose the U.S. government’s immigration enforcement posture. Infrastructure is a component in the scenario; physically crossing into the U.S. requires use of infrastructure, and infrastructure also factors in if it proves to be a terrorist target. Information is being used as a factor in this

scenario, as forces supporting and opposing the present enforcement posture seek to advocate for their respective positions.

Geospatial Analysis Model – Activity Based Intelligence (ABI)

ABI is another appropriate tool for analysis of this scenario. Clark describes ABI as “a discipline of intelligence where the analysis and subsequent collection is focused on the activity and transactions associated with an entity, population, or area of interest” (Clark, 2023, p.397). In the scenario, the entity can be divided into a group containing a subset, which in turn contains three potential subsets. The greater entity is the mass of migrants crossing our nation’s southern border, the subset of that group is “potential terrorists”, and the three potential subsets are “Chinese communist operatives”, “Islamist Jihadis”, and TCOs. The population of interest, here, can be designated as the population of migrants entering the U.S. The area of interest is, for the moment, focused the U.S. southern border. As migrants increasingly disperse to various parts of the nation, the area of interest could change.

There are several geo-spatial ABI-related political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, and information (PMESII) components in this scenario. Political components include national boundaries, such as the southern U.S. border, migrant source nations, and nations that migrants traverse en route to the U.S. There is a geo-spatial aspect to the militaries involved in this crisis moving through geographic areas as they play their role in the ongoing scenario. Economies are impacted by geography-based activity; TCOs trafficking humans earn money doing so, and economies of nations involved in the scenario are impacted in various ways. Geography-based social considerations come into play in the scenario as the ongoing crisis affects existing patterns of behavior or establishes new ones. Infrastructure is tied to geography. ABI seeks to predict activity against baselines of established patterns at points of

geographic importance; several locations in this scenario provide opportunities to analyze that sort of intelligence. The broad category of “information” fits into every aspect of an ABI-based examination of this scenario, as information specific to “activity and transactions associated with an entity, population, or area of interest” (Clark, 2023, p.397) abound throughout the scenario.

Simulation Model – Game Theory

Clark describes *Game Theory* as a paradigm that examines “the decision processes of two or more parties...in conflict or cooperation (Clark, 2023, p.420).” This aptly fits the scenario of a terrorist event resulting from exploitation of the chaotic immigration situation at our nation’s southern border; many parties are involved, some of them cooperating, and some of them in conflict. The parties involved are similar to those that can be described as “components” in a threat network analysis (although there are some such components present in the threat network analysis that are not parties, per se). Game theory’s attempted prediction of the most desired outcome for any party (Game Theory, 2018) provides an appropriate vehicle to examine the scenario from the perspective of any of the involved parties.

Parties involved in this scenario include any governments involved; at a minimum, the U.S. government, affected political subdivisions thereof, such as states and counties impacted by the mass, largely uncontrolled migration occurring now, the Mexican government, perhaps including political subdivisions thereof, and the governments of any nations that might seek to infiltrate operatives into the U.S. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Islamic Republic of Iran may fit such criteria. Other involved parties include political parties of the U.S., the PRC’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA), Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), radical Islamist terrorist organizations, and parties facilitating the movement of migrants, including potential terrorists, into the U.S. The migrants,

themselves also comprise one party to this theoretical game; the operatives who might be amongst the migrants are a subset of that party and should be considered a separate party to the theoretical game.

Infrastructure Targeting

Having assessed the current migration crisis as a potential source of terrorism in the U.S., U.S. government entities use criteria to identify key infrastructure to target. Adversarial communications intelligence (COMINT) is a topic of vital importance. Because communications play a vital role in modern criminal enterprise and human trafficking, the communications systems involved are categorized as high-value targets (HVT). Due to the degree to which critical communications are involved, this is also a high-payoff target (HPT) for U.S. intelligence agencies, in that loss (or in this case, perhaps merely compromise of) secure communications could significantly contribute to success of the U.S. course of action (Joint Chiefs, p.ix).

Key infrastructure

There are multiple instances of key infrastructure involved in the present migration crisis at our nation's southern border. Much of that infrastructure is centered on the border itself; roads, bridges, and border checkpoints are all intrinsic to the border. It is not desirable to destroy key pieces of physical infrastructure along our border with Mexico. In addition to removing important physical resources that our nation needs to operate the border and facilitate the flow of legal migrants and border crossers in both directions when conditions are not so volatile, Mexico would reasonably view the destruction of key infrastructure that we share with Mexico as an extremely hostile act.

However, there are likely several existing infrastructure components that are viable intelligence targets. Here, the term *intelligence targets* is intended to reflect the description in Joint Publication 3-60 (JP 3-60), which describes a target as “an entity considered for possible engagement or action to alter or neutralize the function it performs for the adversary”(Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013, p. I-1). Considering this criteria, a key piece of infrastructure that intelligence agencies can likely exploit is the cellular phone network along the border, which is likely rich source of adversarial COMINT regarding an operational aspect of the scenario. The operational aspect is the smuggling operation that delivers migrants, including potential terrorists, to the U.S. via the border.

Targeting of this potential infrastructure intelligence target merits evaluation through criteria set forth in JP 3-60. To begin with, a communications network is “equipment...a device that provides a function that contributes to a target system’s capability (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013, p.I-1)”. It is important because of its ability to provide information about an opponent’s movements, plans, perceptions, and observations. Thus, the communications network is also “logically and causally tied to objectives at all levels—strategic, operational, and tactical” (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013, p.I-2). Attention should also be given to key aspects of this intelligence target’s physical characteristics, namely its area covered, its number and nature of elements that comprise it, its degree of hardening, such as encryption, and its electromagnetic signature (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013, p.I-2). Attention should also be given to the target’s functional capabilities, especially functional redundancy (should there be alternate means of communication on the part of our adversaries), target importance, and relationship to the overall operations (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013, p.I-2), particularly human trafficking operations. Any

observed physical vulnerabilities (Joint Chiefs of Staff, p. I-3) should also be noted, should the circumstances deteriorate to the point that physically disabling the system might prove desirable.

An additional criterion to consider in the contemplation of a U.S. entity targeting cellular communications infrastructure is whether such targeting could be considered a search and, if so, whether it would pass the Constitution standard set forth in the Fourth Amendment. Should a U.S. law enforcement agency establish enough probable cause for search warrant, it would be incumbent on any U.S. law enforcement agencies involved to ensure that the collection remains within Constitutional limits and conforms to the warrant.

Derivation of Prescriptive Intelligence

Interception of adversarial cellular phone traffic, or two-way radios that utilize cellular architecture to communicate could provide prescriptive intelligence, such as what actions to take at various points in the process of border enforcement. Such intelligence is also sometimes referred to as *prescriptive analytics*, wherein the information seems to “determine an optimal course of action” (Cote, 2021). This may come in the form of “cooperation required” (Clark, 2023, p.429); such cooperation might be required from various U.S. enforcement entities, or from Mexican border agencies. However, this prescriptive intelligence could also direct independent responses, such as the positioning of U.S. CBP patrol personnel or assets in locations best able to address surges in migrant crossings or to respond to locations where it is likely that terrorists are being smuggled into the U.S.

Summary

The southern border and its current migration crisis represent a scenario that could lead to terrorist attacks in the U.S. Terrorists could use the chaotic nature of the southern U.S. border to infiltrate terrorists into the nation. This infiltration may have already occurred and may still be

occurring. The U.S. should recognize this danger and prepare accordingly. Several means of analysis exist that could help to inform decision making in the current situation. Using means of analysis such as Threat Network Analysis, ABI, and Game Theory would help to explore the situation. Despite the fact that much of the key infrastructure involved in this scenario is necessary for ongoing border operations, there does exist the opportunity to use prescriptive intelligence that would enable the intelligence targeting of key infrastructure to mitigate the impact of this situation and perhaps prevent an adverse event.

References

- ABC News (2023, May 13). *Migrant crisis overwhelms US cities* [Video]. YouTube.com.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QAOdJKxnX4>.
- Abbot, Gov. Greg (2024, January 24). [Open letter announcing Texas enforcement measures of unenforced U.S. immigration laws].
https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/Border_Statement_1.24.2024.pdf.
- Bush decries border project (2005, March 24). Washington Times.
<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/mar/24/20050324-122200-6209r/>.
- CBP Enforcement Statistics (2023, November 14). United States Customs and Border Protection. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-enforcement-statistics>.
- Clark, R. M. (2023). *Intelligence Analysis: A Target Centric Approach* (Seventh ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press.
- Cote, C. (2021, November 2). What is prescriptive analytics? Six Examples. Harvard Business School, Online. <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/prescriptive-analytics>.
- Country reports on terrorism 2020: Mexico (2020). United States Department of State; Bureau of Counterterrorism. <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2020/mexico/>.
- Factsheet: Final FY23 numbers show worst year at America's borders – Ever. (2023, October 26). United States House of Representatives Majority Committee on Homeland Security. <https://homeland.house.gov/2023/10/26/factsheet-final-fy23-numbers-show-worst-year-at-americas-borders-ever/>.

- Game Theory. (2018). *Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia*, 1. <https://research-ebsco-com.nauproxy01.national.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=0da896f4-117d-3e5b-b39d-2e274686add5>.
- Gramlich, J. (2023, January 13). Monthly encounters with migrants at U.S.-Mexico border remain near record highs. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/13/monthly-encounters-with-migrants-at-u-s-mexico-border-remain-near-record-highs/>.
- September Houston Democratic Debate Transcript – Third Debate. (2019, September 12). <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/democratic-debate-transcript-houston-september-12-2019>.
- Joint Chiefs of Staff (2013, January 31). *Joint Publication 3-60; Joint Targeting*. https://www.justsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Joint_Chiefs-Joint_Targeting_20130131.pdf.
- Suárez, K. (2021, July 1). Cartels reap growing profits in the smuggling of migrants across the US-Mexico border. *Courrier-Journal*. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/investigations/2021/07/01/mexican-cartels-fuel-immigration-crisis-at-us-border/5290082001/>.
- Toedte, B. (2021, June 5). Mexico mid-terms marred by threats, attacks and killings. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57359252>.
- Trejo, G., & Ley, S. (2021). High-Profile Criminal Violence: Why Drug Cartels Murder Government Officials and Party Candidates in Mexico. *British Journal of Political Science*, 51(1), 203-229. doi:10.1017/S0007123418000637.

Van Hear, N., Bakewell, O., & Long, K. (2018). Push-pull plus: reconsidering the drivers of migration. *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, 44(6), 927–944. <https://doi-org.nauproxy01.national.edu/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384135>.