



Spillover Threat

Spurs Proactive Border Security Initiatives

• LT. DAVE MYERS
 • SAN DIEGO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

San Diego County Law Enforcement Responds With Integrated, Collaborative Approach

Border Violence in Context

At last count, more than 9,000 people have died in drug-related violence that has convulsed Mexico since 2007, when President Felipe Calderon launched an anti-drug trafficking campaign that targeted the powerful Mexican drug cartels. That's more than U.S. fatalities in the Iraq war.

The effects of this drug war in Mexico have spilled, some would say boiled over, into the U.S., where law enforcement officials in some border communities have seen alarming trends in murders and kidnappings linked to drug and human trafficking activities by the Mexican drug cartels. In August 2009, San Diego law enforcement officials announced charges against a Mexican gang that took Tijuana-style violence to Chula Vista, a suburb of San Diego County, kidnapping, torturing and killing well-to-do residents. Members of

a Tijuana-based Arellano Felix drug cartel moved across the border in 2002 and posing as U.S. law enforcement, snatched victims outside homes and public places. Nine victims were killed from 2004 to 2007, and the bodies of two of them were dissolved in chemicals at a rented house in San Diego. Gang members associated with the same Mexican drug cartel were also charged with trying to murder a Chula Vista police officer in September 2005. Approximately 350 miles east of San Diego, the City of Phoenix has gained the dubious distinction of being the nation's kidnapping capital, with 357 in 2007 and 368 in 2008. The city is on track to post another record year for kidnappings for 2009. Phoenix officials report that unprecedented ferocity is often a hallmark of the abductions taking place in this south Arizona city of 1.5 million that serves as a prime shipment point for drugs and human cargo.

How Border Violence Affect Communities

So far, the vast majority of the violence that has spilled over into the U.S. has been restricted to the players in the drug trade: trafficker-on-trafficker. But law enforcement officials and analysts agree that it is only a matter of time before innocent people on the U.S. side get caught in the cartel crossfire. The reality of trafficker-on-trafficker crimes is that it is still violence on the streets of America and if those people get in a gun battle, those bullets have to go somewhere. They could end up spraying a playground where kids are playing or they could riddle a neighbor's house where a mom who has nothing to do whatsoever with the illegal activity is sleeping. In short, the so-called "collateral damage" from trafficker-on-trafficker crimes in the U.S. could be innocent individuals who've become senseless victims of the violence.

Just as sinister, the Los Angeles Times recently reported that open season has been declared on U.S. law enforcement. Citing sources and intelligence memos, the LA Times article disclosed that Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman Loera, a 54-year-old drug cartel leader of the Sinaloa drug trafficking organization, has reportedly issued shoot-to-kill instructions that include not only Mexican authorities and cartel rivals but also U.S. law enforcement officials. This marks a dangerous turn of events for U.S. law enforcement because the cartels have historically tried to avoid direct confrontation with U.S. law enforcement. If the LA Times article on "El Chapo" is correct, the stakes have suddenly gotten higher, much higher.

Re-inventing, Not Re-creating the Wheel

When first confronted with threat of spillover violence from the Mexican drug war, then Undersheriff San Diego Sheriff Bill Gore led the effort among county law enforcement agencies to evaluate existing task forces and operations to see whether they could address the spillover effects. Sheriff Gore (who was appointed to succeed Sheriff Kolender in July 2009) and his law enforcement colleagues understood that there was no need to re-create the wheel if existing resources could be leveraged. The consensus reached among local, state and federal agencies in San Diego County was that the nature of border violence – transnational criminals, wide range of crimes involved, patchwork quilt of jurisdictions among federal, state and local law enforcement – required a new approach. Existing crime-suppression operations and task forces had too narrow of a focus to adequately cover the multi-faceted aspects of border violence and often involved some but not all of the agencies that had a stake in the targeted issue. In their quest to not re-create the wheel, law enforcement officials realized that what was needed was re-invention of the wheel to make it perform better in a dramatically different landscape.

Operation Stonegarden As Catalyst for Collaboration

Relying on intelligence from law enforcement agencies at all levels, Sheriff Gore led his Department's initiative to develop an all-threats, layered, and integrated approach to border violence. They put their approach into action using a \$5.6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security called Operation Stonegarden, an initiative that provides fund-

ing for state, local, and tribal law enforcement in areas along the border that are vulnerable to the entry of terrorists and in corridors known for human and narcotics smuggling. Operation Stonegarden recognizes that there is a local law enforcement aspect to border security, which is that when spillover violence occurs, state and local law enforcement agencies – not federal agencies – are typically the first responders. The program also acknowledges that state and local law enforcement agencies have significant roles

***...law enforcement officials
and analysts agree that it
is only a matter of time before
innocent people on the U.S. side
get caught in the cartel crossfire.***

to play both in addressing the current violence and preparing for scenarios where violence in Mexico could further strain the United States.

Operation Stonegarden in Action

Partnering with five other state and local law enforcement agencies (San Diego Harbor Police, California Department of Fish and Game, California Highway Patrol, Chula Vista Police, and San Diego County Probation Department) the San Diego Sheriff's Department worked with U.S. Border Protection, the U.S. Coast Guard, ICF, ATF and other federal agencies to identify and address border-related threats. Federal, state and local law enforcement agencies also coordinated the sharing of resources and intelligence in support of border crime suppression. This meant that participating law enforcement agencies had to resist the bureaucratic tendency towards turf protection and "resource-hogging." In San Diego County's case, much of the groundwork towards the sharing of intelligence was already completed by the newly initiated Law Enforcement Coordination Center (LECC), an information and intelligence "fusion center" involving every level and discipline of government including federal, state, local, and tribal authorities. Operation Stonegarden participants were quick to leverage the LECC's intelligence resources to plan and carry out their border-crime operations.

Thanks to Operation Stonegarden, residents of San Diego County, particularly in the remote, rural areas and in the South Bay >>

San Diego County's All-Threats, Layered Integrated Approach



"All-threats" refers to the fact that border-related violence can come in many forms, ranging from murders to kidnappings to burglary and human smuggling. Law enforcement strategies, tactics and operations should reflect the wide and multi-faceted nature of border-related crimes.

"Layered" speaks to the fact that border-related crimes cut across many jurisdictional boundaries, including federal, state and local law enforcement levels as well as between different agencies statutory authority within the same levels. It is therefore critical to have participation from all levels of law enforcement and from all agencies that have a border-related connection to ensure a comprehensive approach to the threat of spillover violence.

"Integrated" means identifying available resources from Federal, state and local law enforcement agencies and bringing all of them to bear in a coordinated and collaborative manner on the problems of border violence. Rather than federal, state and local law enforcement agencies working parallel to each other, the intent of this approach is to promote the sharing of resources and intelligence among and within all levels of law enforcement to address crimes that have a border-related nexus.



Meet Justice

CSSA's Newest Mascot

With over 50 entries into CSSA's name our stuffed K9 German Shepherd Mascot contest, the panel of judges had a difficult time selecting the winning name. There were many creative names to choose from and after much deliberation the winning name went to Claude E. DeMoss of San Jose and David W. Piper Jr. of Westminster who both submitted entries for the name "Justice". As the winners they will receive "Justice". Thank you to all that submitted an entry.

"Justice" can be purchased for only \$15 (plus S/H and tax) through CSSA's Merchandise Store. To place your order today, fill out the enclosed Merchandise Form within the magazine and mail or fax to CSSA, go online at www.calsheriffs.org or call Member Services at 800-967-4222.

border area, saw an increase in proactive patrols and flights by Sheriff's helicopters. Just as important, Operation Stonegarden participants were able to get the right tools to improve their ability to monitor and observe criminal activity associated with the border. These items include surveillance cameras and license plate readers. Additionally, Operation Stonegarden participants obtained vehicles such as SUV's equipped with advanced police equipment so that their officers could access remote areas situated near the U.S.-Mexico border.

Shared Vision, Not Shared Immigration Enforcement

It should be noted that none of San Diego County's border crime suppression efforts involve the enforcement of federal immigration laws by local law enforcement. Participation in Operation Stonegarden and the Southwest Border Strategy does not give local law enforcement agencies immigration enforcement authority. This is consistent with the San Diego Sheriff Department's long-standing policy on immigration laws, which is that deputy sheriffs in patrol assignments, who encounter illegal aliens during the course of their duties, are permitted by policy to detain these individuals for a reasonable period of time until they can be turned over to Border Patrol Agents. Both Operation Stonegarden and the Southwest Border Strategy seek to foster the sharing of critical resources and collaboration – not the sharing of jurisdictional authorities – among federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

Real, Tangible Results

San Diego County's all-threats, layered and integrated approach to border violence is having a tangible and lasting impact on controlling and preventing border crimes. According to Sheriff Gore, since the launch of Operation Stonegarden, there has been a 50 percent decrease in violent crimes in eastern San Diego East County, where most of Operation Stonegarden's efforts have been focused. There has also been an 85% increase in Operation Stonegarden deputy-initiated activity (hands-on activity enforcement) compared to the same period last year in the San Diego East County border area, which indicates that the increased Operation Stonegarden-funded activities such as increased patrols to reduce smuggling and border-related crimes, traffic stops in high-intensity drug and human trafficking areas, and aerial support and night surveillance flights are making a difference. Additionally, more than

a dozen nationwide intelligence reports have been issued based on information gathered as a result Operation Stonegarden activities in San Diego County. Just as important, because of the relationships, operational tactics, and resource-sharing that have been developed with federal and state agencies through Operation Stonegarden, San Diego County law enforcement agencies are among the best-prepared in the nation to address any future spillover effects from the ongoing drug wars in Mexico.

The Road Ahead

Due to Operation Stonegarden's success, the Sheriff's Department, which serves as the grant administrator for the program, has received requests to join from practically every local enforcement agency in San Diego County. Sheriff Gore believes that this bodes well for the continued success of border crime suppression because there would be a unified and cohesive front at the local level against border violence. He said, "Trans-border criminals will be severely curtailed in their ability to slip through local jurisdictions and evade apprehension. Additionally, the intelligence that the new participants bring will be invaluable for planning and tactical purposes."

Congress, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Department of Justice believe that San Diego County's approach to border violence is on the right track. In addition to being cited as a "best practice" for border violence suppression, San Diego County's Operation Stonegarden program received an additional \$13.7 million from DHS for FY 2009, the largest single award among all applicants across the nation. In July 2009, U.S. Attorney Eric Holder announced a grant of \$5 million for San Diego County as part of the Justice Department's Southwest Border Strategy. These funds, as with the Operation Stonegarden grants, would be used to support local law enforcement's efforts to combat and prevent border-related violence. The Sheriff's Department is in the process of leveraging the Southwest Border Strategy funds to create a team of 16 uniformed dedicated officers to patrol the border for drug smuggling. Southwest Border Strategy funds will also pay for a dedicated deputy district attorney to prosecute those apprehended during the patrols and other border-related crime operations. ✪

LT. Dave Myers is in charge of the San Diego Sheriff Department's Operation Stonegarden initiative and also the Border Crime Suppression Team. He can be reached via email at david.myers@sdsheriff.org