Border Security: Technology, Infrastructure, or Cooperation

Abstract

Border security is an important aspect of national security. Around the world, borders are areas that continuously bring conflict and concern. The US-Mexico border is no different. As more advanced ways of enhancing border security are created, figuring out which tactic to implement or the most effective way to implement them is a challenging task. The different ideologies surrounding the border and how it is secured makes the task of implementing security measures more difficult.

There are many different ways that the US-Mexico border is secured, but making it more secure and efficient is always a goal. Adding more advanced technology and infrastructure are two expensive but common ways to add protection for the border. Another tactic is to increase cooperation between Mexico and the United States. This cooperation, though difficult to coordinate, could prove to be most influential. Pursuing this cooperative attitude with Mexico will allow a more expansive battle on transnational crime aimed for the United States.

Background

When it comes to national security, there are many different factors that play a role in the overall efforts the keep the nation secure and free from threats. One of the major topics of this field is border security. After the terrorist attacks on 9/11, border security became a widely discussed subject among professionals like policy makers and the President and among civilians. As political and social constructs, borders have created and continue to create issues regarding territories and the illegal entry of those who do not belong to a certain territory. The US-Mexico border is an example of a border where there is a concentration of strict security measures to
ensure illegal entry does not occur. The security at the border has a main goal to thwart illegal entry and potential security concerns for the United States that are associated with illegal entry. Policy makers and the President are faced with many challenges when it comes to border security and how to maintain a secure border without violating the rights of those who are crossing. There are many different ideas about the most efficient and secure way to protect the border between the United States and Mexico including technologically advanced methods, infrastructure, and mutual cooperation with Mexico. Distinguishing between the various methods and determining which are most secure and efficient is a main question of concern.

Obstructing the movement of weapons, drugs, and people, as well as protecting economic prosperity and national sovereignty are all reasons that make border security an essential part of the overall national security efforts. If not taken seriously, the fight against drug trafficking, human trafficking, and all other forms of illegal movements will be allowed to flourish and can successfully infiltrate the United States. While these issues still occur under a more stringent border, advancing border security using technology, infrastructure, and cooperation will mitigate and help maintain them. In a world where technology advancements are seen daily, implementing these advancements at the border can help achieve the overall efficiency of border movements, while maintaining the security goals.

Method and analysis Development

The information provided in this analysis will provide policy makers and border personnel information about border security and suggestions on how implementing technology and infrastructure and increasing cooperation could be most influential in keeping the border secure. The evidence provided will create a better understanding of how current technology can
be advanced and implemented in a more expansive effort on the border. Physical barriers and tactical infrastructure already exist, but maintaining them and keeping them updated will prove to facilitate the goal of border security at a high cost. A push for increased cooperation with Mexico will provide support from both sides of the border and can facilitate the objectives of border security as well. The information provided will promote these three perspectives.

Border security is a widely talked about topic all over the world. For the United States, the US-Mexico border crossing is the top land border crossing that concerns policy makers and citizens. It is assumed that the audience wants a nation that is free of drug trafficking and human trafficking, as well as all other threats to the freedom and livelihood of everyday lives. Protecting the border and enforcing technology, infrastructure, and cooperation are three tactics that can protect the nation from threats that illegal border crossings and lax security measures simplify.

Understanding the concepts of surveillance technology, performance metrics, tactical infrastructure, “profiling out”, and “pushing the border out” will help in the overall understanding of the context of this paper. Surveillance technology, according to Rebecca Gambler, is “cameras and sensors, which the Border Patrol uses to assist its efforts to secure the border and to apprehend individuals attempting to cross the border illegally” (Gambler 1). Other technologies including thermal imaging devices, integrated fixed towers, and mobile video surveillance systems are also integral parts of surveillance technology. Performance metrics is a term that is important for understanding the contributions that each security measures makes to the broad border security goals. Performance metrics are indicators or types of data (videos for example) that are measured to understand the effectiveness of certain measures set into place. If applied to the technologies that are implemented at the border, performance metrics can help determine which programs are effective and which are not. This can help alleviate wasted time
and money. Tactical infrastructures are the physical barriers, roads, drainage systems, lights, and fencing that promote the mission of Border Patrol and the overall border security initiative by helping deter illegal border crossings. The concept of “profiling out” is an idea that K. Jack Riley from the Rand Corporation mentions in his article on border security tactics. “Profiling out” is “identifying trustworthy people or entities that will be allowed to circumvent routine inspections” (Riley 589). This initiative aims to increase the efficiency of border crossings regarding trade and commerce, so the focus can be aimed at trouble spots along the border. Finally, the idea of “pushing the border out” is aimed to “extend the reach of our security” (Riley 609). This extension can allow border security operations to operate offshore in order to halt security threats before they reach the border. This is a proactive approach to enhancing security.

While there are many different ideas from many different outlooks on how the border should be protected, there will be a focus on technology, infrastructure, and cooperation to support border security initiatives in this article. As these ideas are expressed, the objective of keeping the American public safe and protected from the threats posed by lax border security are kept in mind. All of the information provided is from open source material. Research using scholarly search engines and the university library allowed for credible sources to be used. Articles from all perspectives, for and against more stringent security measures, helped understand the topics from different viewpoints. Video documentaries are also an important tool in understanding border security because they provide visual representations of the struggles and goals in and around the border.

The signing of the Guadalupe Hidalgo treaty in 1848 established the boundaries that would turn in to the border there is today between the United States and Mexico. Since then, issues surrounding the border have continued to create discussion among each nation. A major
event that had great impact on border security in the United States were the terrorist attacks on 9/11. After these attacks, the United States began implementing more rigorous border security procedures. The debate surrounding the different border tactics continues to fuel the discourse in the public and political spheres. Different organizations continue to research border security and provide their views and suggestions on increasing the success at the border.

The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) is an influential agency that wrote an article on the progress and challenges that the border faces in regard to technology, tactical infrastructure, and personnel. Under the control of Congress, they provided valuable information on how to implement more efficient measures on the border to ensure taxpayer dollars are being used in the most economical ways. A big focus on technology was integrated into their report. More specifically, the use of surveillance technology like radar, remote video surveillance systems, unattended ground sensors, among others. Key information from their report finds that implementing more surveillance technology can keep the security personnel on the ground from being spread too thin. If there is a shortage on border agents, technology can balance it out. To avoid spending funds on unimpactful technology equipment, GAO stressed the importance of acquiring performance metrics. The lack of performance metrics that are collected at the border may be leading to unneeded spending. If the metrics are collected, it can determine which surveillance technologies are most impactful and supportive of the border security initiative. Ways to determine effectiveness of technology systems can be determined by comparing apprehension statistics before and after implementation of the system. GAO also expressed importance in the tactical infrastructure on the border. The Secure Fence Act of 2006 created a requirement for the Department of Homeland Security to build at least two layers of fencing along the US-Mexico border, specifically around the western part. This act generated
more than 600 miles of border fencing on the border. The Secure Fencing Act of 2006 not only
dealt with creating infrastructure along the border, but it also led to the insertion of technology
like cameras and sensors. The United States Government Accountability Office has provided
important information regarding border security and ways in which taxpayers dollars are spent to
protect it. This is a good source of information because GAO works directly under Congress and
provides Congress and other federal agencies with influential information on ways to save
money and create a more efficient border experience.

The RAND Corporation provided another important article on different aspects of border
security. As a research institution, they help research and develop solutions to public policy
challenges. In their article on border control, they focused on ideas about how the border
facilitates trade and ways in which technology can make commerce movements on the border
more efficient. They also discussed unregulated land borders and how those looking to cross
illegally have adapted to the new security measures. Borders are extremely important to the
American and world economies. All forms of trade enter a country through one of its many
borders such as ports, air, or land borders. Without this flow of trade over the United States’
borders, the economy would suffer. RAND suggests a tactic called “profiling out.” This tactic
would allow for a more efficient border experience by trading companies and other trustworthy
people or entities. They would circumvent the routine inspections that each person entering the
country must do, unless they are deemed trustworthy. This would facilitate trade and make a
faster more efficient border crossing experience. Technology like Pulsed Fast-Neutron Analysis
(PENA) is like MRI technology and can help border agents see what is present inside large cargo
vehicles, and if present, can allow them to see individual contraband. These proposed plans are
important, but they are not able to be implemented on unregulated land borders. These areas are
often filled with harsh terrain and no security personnel guarding it. Surveillance technology like UAVs, helicopters, and fixed-wing aircrafts are deployed there, but the constant adaption of smugglers is hard to combat without feet on the ground. The information provided by RAND is important because it is a perspective the aims for protection of all people. No matter where they are from, RAND provides policy issues with solutions to provide a safer world. Their idea on US-Mexico border security reduces bias that supports a more American perspective.

The Universidad Nacional Autónoma De México is another interesting source that wrote on the topic of border security. Their perspective from the other side of the border provided important details that could aid in creating an all-inclusive border security initiative that is supportive of both nations. They prioritized cooperation with Mexico over the construction of a border wall. Trade among Mexico and the United States makes them partners in that area. They are co-dependent on each other and their network for commerce depends greatly on cooperation. President Trump’s proposed border wall will have a great negative impact on this cooperation. With funding for the wall undetermined, many people on both sides of the border are opposed to its construction. While the wall would provide a great deal of infrastructural security, it would not always stop transnational criminals. Their creative and adaptive tactics would continue to deceive border security. Adding a more inclusive cooperation tactic could lead to increased cooperation on the Mexico side in regard to stopping the criminal before they reach the border.

Experts from other news sources and institutions also provided valuable information on different border tactics from many different viewpoints. The National Interest mentioned the idea that border security could be bolstered if the United States focused on its internal demand for contraband that enters from Mexico, like drugs and weapons. If the demand for these items is decreased in the United States, the supply coming from Mexico would not be as extreme. They
also mentioned increased cooperation between Mexico and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has helped strategize ways to extinguish the financial infrastructure of Mexico’s drug cartels. This cooperation is important for the border security initiative. A Brookings article on borders provided an interesting twist to the idea of implementing more technology, infrastructure, and cooperation. They wrote that instead of enhancing physical barriers and technology, enhancing cooperation in the economic sphere could help free up unneeded “noise” with trading partners on the border. This could allow more attention to the transitional threats of criminals rather than inspecting incoming trade items. The facts and information that all of these articles provided is some of the best unclassified information available regarding border security.

**Implications**

The most widely talked about implication from many sources was an increased cooperation with Mexico to help facilitate a safer more efficient border for each nation. Under the assumption that the citizens of each nation want to feel safe and free, striving for more cooperation between Mexico and the United States could help economically with trade and could help thwart transnational crime. “Profiling out” and creating faster programs for companies in the commerce industry could lead to more economic prosperity for both nations. Collaborating on cross-border security, rather than focusing on a one-sided security plan, could redistribute security personnel to high threat areas and allow for greater access to transnational commerce. Cooperation in the sphere of criminal activity could also help alleviate transnational criminals from crossing the border. An anti-crime program can be created with cooperation between Mexico and the United States. This plan can help stop the flow of people and goods before they get to the border and can become a way to “push the border out.” Cooperation on the concern
that transnational criminal organizations can infiltrate nations beyond Mexico and the United States should be considered as well. If an increased cooperation created a more advanced program targeting these organization before they reached our border or before they had an impact on fragile states in the region, it could not only help regional stability, but the border security threats as well. The flow of crime, drugs, and people through Central America and into Mexico often times have a goal of reaching the United States. An anti-crime program could help thwart these threats before they reach the border. With the help and cooperation from the United States, Mexico could have a greater impact on targeting the criminal organization within their nation.

There are counter arguments to increasing the cooperation between Mexico and the United States for the purpose of smoother commerce transport and thwarting transnational criminal organizations. One of the arguments states that even though there is cooperation between the two nations doesn’t mean that all individuals with nefarious intentions can be weeded out. If a company who has prior clearance and has been “profiled out” becomes hostile toward the United States, they can still infiltrate an attack on U.S. soil. “Profiling out” and increased cooperation to make commerce transport faster and more efficient on the border does not guarantee that transnational criminal organizations cannot take advantage of this program. Another counter argument for increased cooperation is that these transnational criminal organizations that we are up against are far more expansively spaced than just in Central America and Mexico. These organizations can originate from any place in the world. Mutual cooperation in stopping these organization would have to be far more extensive than an anti-crime program. The idea that a cooperation agreement could help stop these crime organizations from accessing the fragile states in Central America is not as easy as it sounds. Some cooperation
would also be necessary from those Central American countries. The corruption that surrounds these countries, including Mexico, would also make it hard to complete the intended task of stopping these criminals before they reach the border.

Another major implication that could reinforce the border security initiative is implementing more advanced technology and infrastructure along the border. These could facilitate a stronger more secure border that makes it harder for illegal crossings to occur. Adding advanced technology like Pulsed Fast-Neutron Analysis (PENA), radar, sensors, and other surveillance equipment could help surveille areas of the border that are unregulated. While there is harsh terrain in these unregulated land borders, it does not stop people from attempting to cross illegally. Adding technology could create a protective blanket over the area without putting any security personnel in danger due to the terrain and inaccessibility of the area. These technologies could also allow for less personnel to work on commerce transport at border crossings, so they can allocate their work toward stopping threats and crime from entering. Constructing more tactical infrastructure like fencing, drainage systems, roads, and other forms of infrastructure would make is harder for illegal border crossings as well. It would add another layer of protection and could create more time for responders to get to an area where someone is trying to cross constructed infrastructure. Technology and infrastructure can be constructed together to further impede the border security issues of illegal crossings and transnational crime.

A counter argument for this implication would be that adding more technology and infrastructure along the border that already has these things would be a huge expenditure to the taxpayer dollars. The cost of applying new technology and infrastructure would be a tremendous amount. According to GAO, “CBP spent approximately $2.4 billion from fiscal year 2007 through 2015 to deploy tactical infrastructure” (Gambler 2). To reinforce this infrastructure
would cost the same, if not more. How effective would it be to add more to the current
technology and infrastructure? Another argument is that it is not known whether or not the
current deployed technology is effective. The lack of performance metrics on current technology
means that it is unknown whether or not they are making contributions to security. Paying to add
more advanced technology may not be the most beneficial if what is already there has not been
investigated in regard to its effectiveness.

Conclusion

The topic surrounding border security is a complex multidimensional issue that is not any
singular nation’s issue. As new threats to national security come about, new ways to extinguish
these threats are needed. For the US-Mexico border, increased mutual cooperation is a necessary
element of the overall border security initiative. While this cooperation will be complicated, it is
an important step in alleviating pressures on the border and security issues that arise from
Mexico. Adding more advanced technology and more tactical infrastructure is not the most
efficient and profitable way to promote border security because it is already there. Adding
more would not prove to be a large enough impact on combating border security issues for the
cost it would incur.
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