

# BORDER SECURITY - - A VITAL INTEREST IN SEARCH OF A STRATEGY

## Background

Over the years, successive border security programs have met with repeated failure.

Failure, in this sense, resulted – in part – from an ill-disciplined approach and an unfocused execution. The failure to outline a clear vision, or strategy, for our border security, and the resulting absence of a functional operating concept, have created unsatisfactory outcomes from successive surveillance systems deployed to date.

When asked in 2006 what the biggest terrorism-related threat is at the border, then Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) Commissioner, Ralph Basham said the CBP should be ready for anything.

*"I don't know that I can say specifically where the greatest threat is," he says. "I think that we have to interdict every piece of contraband, every illegal alien that tries to get in here, whether they come by air, by land or by sea. The terrorists come back. They look for the weaknesses. They look for the vulnerabilities. You cannot predict where the attack is going to come from, so you have to be prepared for it to come from anywhere."*

The statement, by its very nature, suggested a project of breathtaking scope, but also reveals something extremely disconcerting - - an absence of a sound and achievable strategy that could assure success and the procurement of the right tools to support that strategy.

Several years and one Administration have passed since those words were uttered. And, while recent policy pronouncements suggest implementation of a broad, comprehensive strategy, the actions to date suggest otherwise. The Secure Border Initiative (SBI), which itself was preceded by an earlier ill-fated border surveillance project, has been started and stopped twice. The one consistent theme that seems to characterize all these efforts is an apparent absence of an incisive overarching strategy that, in turn, would shape a basic operating concept. The results appear to have produced a smorgasbord of impractical and costly solutions that never seem to meet the broader security needs, or work effectively.

The compelling desire to be this all-encompassing solution to seal our borders, while laudable, is woefully optimistic, wastes precious time and financial resources, and, in the end, is doomed to fail. While our Customs and Border Patrol is probably the foremost border security force in the world, the failure to have a strategy and operating concept, substantially diminishes the capacity of our outstanding agents to optimally execute their mission to guard our Nation's borders. This is not some arcane intellectual point nor is the impact being overstated. Like our armed forces fighting to defend our interests overseas, our CBP agents are fighting a battle no less significant along our borders. Make no mistake about it - - they may be wearing different uniforms, but CBP agents are involved in a fight, the outcome of which is just as vital to the country's security. But a crucial difference between the two is that the Armed Forces fighting our Nation's wars are equipped with the by-products of technology

that are not randomly deduced but rather crafted by an overarching military strategy and doctrine (operational concept) that assures success on the battlefield.

### Formulating a Strategy

Can we say that Customs and Border Patrol is armed with a similar strategy and operational concept? If the last several attempts at creating a seamless “virtual wall” of sensors is any example, then the answer would appear to be no. If there was, we would see a structure, a clear roadmap, to the acquisition of the right systems to support an achievable end state for our border security program. Instead, we seem to be throwing disparate technologies at the problem in a discordant way without considering ways to achieve synergies between the different components of the overall system. Moreover, the systems acquired for SBInet seemed more of an infatuation for layering the latest and greatest exotic technology on top of each other rather than procuring sensible and practical solutions for the security architecture needed. Processes and intelligence in this approach tend to be isolated, and the effectiveness, much less the utility, of the systems deployed to date has resulted in SBI’s checkered performance. The Administration, based on its March 2009 announcement of a comprehensive approach to our border security challenges, would seem to acknowledge the need to secure the synergy mentioned above, and to draw together the disparate efforts of multiple U.S. agencies and departments as well as develop a cohesive approach with our Mexican neighbors to the south. Nevertheless, the architecture represented below suggests that a basic strategy is still needed.



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Patrol

The above illustration would appear to be very impressive at first blush. But a closer inspection reveals a salient weakness in the security architecture. Look at that component of the above depiction which represents the point of the spear in our border security mission -- the agent on the front line. In this illustration his only connection to the suite of sensors supporting this program is radio communications. Thus the element most directly connected with the tactical execution of our border security mission is

the one furthest removed from the real-time link to the sensor by-product of that mission. And while last March's pronouncement emphasized an across the board increase in manpower for our border security program it did nothing to seemingly enhance that capability with a thoughtful technical operating concept.

What does a proper border security strategy look like and how can that help to shape the acquisition of the right technical components to support that strategy? In simple terms, a strategy should be a clear statement of what you want to achieve with a plan you wish to implement. The failure to first define a lucid strategy for SBInet, and then create the surveillance program needed for that strategy, is at the root of that program's lack of success since its inception. A reasonably incisive strategy addresses three basic questions - - what are you trying to achieve (desired endstate), who will execute it, and how are you going to achieve it? But crucial in all of this is the planning assumptions upon which the strategy and subsequent plans are based. If they are wrong, unreasonable, or unachievable, everything that follows will fail as well.

If we would go back to the statement above from Mr. Basham and use that as an example of planning assumptions one would see something emblematic of everything that is wrong with our border security program and we could understand why SBInet has failed up to this point. The assumption that a plan should insure "the interdiction of every piece of contraband, every illegal alien, . . . by air, land, and sea" is to create a strategy that is based on unachievable and impractical planning assumptions and, consequently, doomed from the outset. Are we truly seeking to establish a seamless virtual wall of sensors that provides an impenetrable barrier for our border? Have we become so seduced by the powers of technology that it clouds our objectivity as we pursue a border security "silver bullet" that doesn't exist?

So if SBInet has not been served by the right strategy and operational concept, then what is the correct strategy? It starts with reasonable assumptions. The first is a negative - - that we are not seeking to achieve an impenetrable virtual surveillance wall along the border. That approach led to a system that briefed well and looked great on power point slides but fell under its own weight once put into practice. The next assumption is that you tailor the fight to the way you want it to unfold and not the way the threat wants it to. You want to be inside the threat's decision cycle and not the other way around. The third assumption is that you view the border as a type of "battlefield" and, as such, you use the terrain and your human and technical resources to shape that battlefield. This assumes that respective regional CBP headquarters do their intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) to identify routes and look for gaps in coverage to economically and more effectively deploy the human and technical tools at their disposal.

### **Strategy and Operational Concept Application**

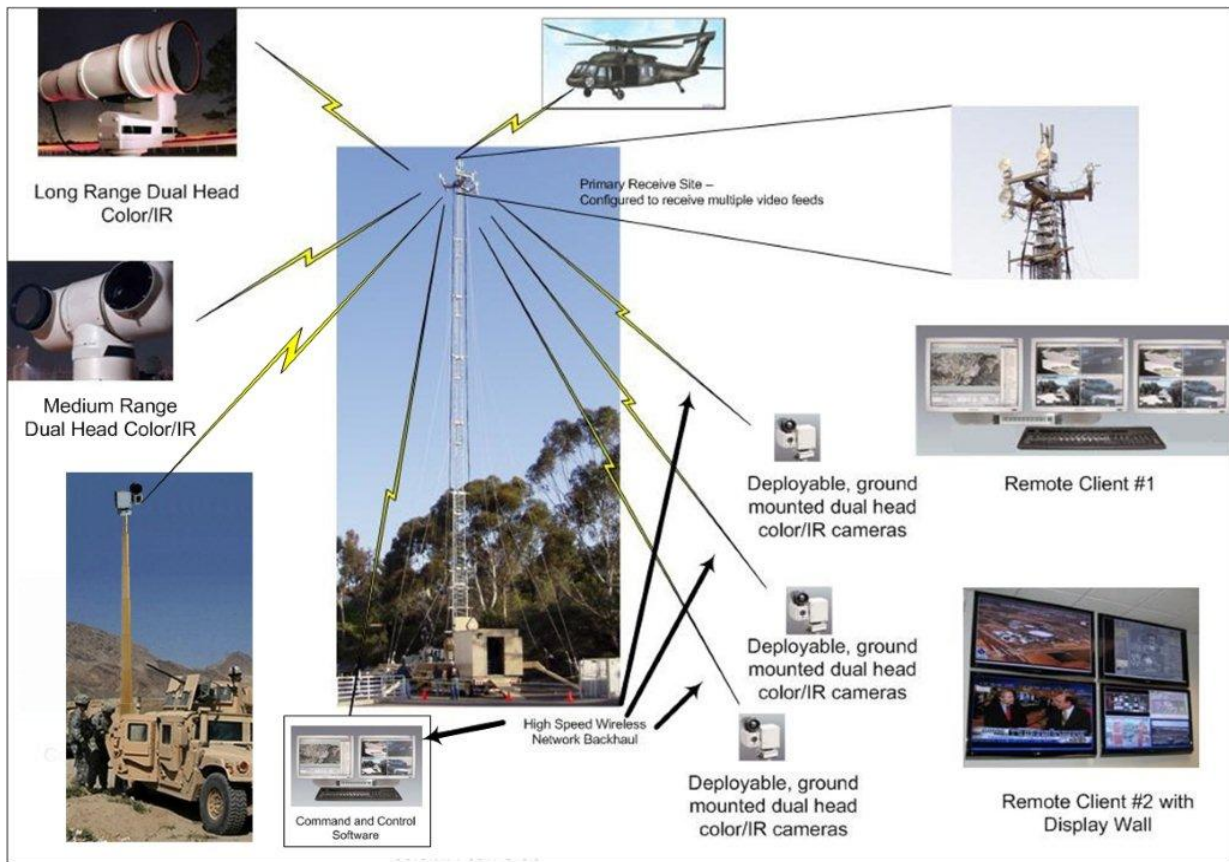
With the above in mind let's look at how to reshape our approach to the challenge by focusing our energies and applying our resources against what should be the most critical component of our strategy - - the agents along the border. Doing this means recasting the tenor of the supporting surveillance systems by adapting more mobile and deployable surveillance systems at the Border Patrol Agent level.

Such an approach not only enhances the ability to prosecute a more effective border security strategy, but also ensures a more cost effective use of funding for such a system. Providing vehicular-mounted rapidly deployable mobile surveillance platforms is the key to an overarching strategy that places priority on the tactical fight and provides a capability to make the agents more proactive and responsive to the threat on the ground. In doing so it also enhances the agent's security by providing real-time day/night visualization of the individual agent's "battlespace" such that he/she can see potential threats and react before the fact and not when it is too late. The architecture for such a system centers around vehicular borne rapid mast surveillance systems outfitted with a day/night/thermal camera array with video streaming into a computer monitor inside the vehicle for the agent to view real time. This system is anchored to a state-of-the-art QuickMast that can ascend or descend a sensor package in 5-7 seconds (see figure below). It is adaptable to a myriad of military and commercial vehicles and allows the operator-agent to bound rapidly from location to location and set up near-instantaneous surveillance without leaving the vehicle. This package can also be augmented with a ruggedized self-contained ground surveillance package for more sustained operations in a specific area.



**QuickMast**

Simultaneously this, and other video sources, can be backhauled to centralized command and control facilities via strategically located mobile receive towers that can also relocate to multiple locations in the area of operations (AO). This system architecture would also include video feeds from multiple aerial sources (fixed wing, helicopters, and UAVs). While this system would be capable of receiving and transmitting video from an array of aerial platforms, taking a cue from the Army would see a heavy reliance on light, less costly, easily deployable UAVs that are proliferating the market place and which can be deployed by the forward positioned Border Patrol agent who, along with his/her higher headquarters, could see this provided video real-time through the vehicle QuickMast System and could be used to vector him and other assets to potential target areas. An example of this Mobile Receive Site, similar to ones currently deployed in Iraq, is shown below. This 120' tower system would be connected to multiple interim small receive sites as well as the vehicular QuickMast systems that populate the area of operations as well as other sensors in the total system.



### Deployable Receive Site System

Defining a sound strategy and operating concept, as noted earlier, demands a clear understanding of what the desired endstate is, who is executing the strategy, and how the selected technical tools will support execution of that strategy. If “impenetrable” is not an achievable endstate then what is? The answer is one word - - “disruption.” The objective of a “disruption strategy” takes a different tact in that

it assumes there will be some penetration of our borders. But by changing the dynamics and geometry of the operating environment, by avoiding established patterns of activity, and by being equipped with the tools to move rapidly around the area of operations, you keep the bad guys guessing, forcing him to change his modus operandi and not the other way around. By proliferating the "battlespace" with a myriad of rapidly deployable QuickMast systems, complemented by numerous low cost, light UAVs, anchored to an integrated backhaul/receive site system, the CBP has at its disposal a robust, yet reasonably affordable, surveillance capability which can successively support an achievable strategy.

Armed with the above surveillance capabilities and outfitted with Night Observation Devices (NODs) agents can maneuver, day and night, stealthily and much safer throughout their AO. Bounding from overwatch to overwatch positions with a much greater sense of situational awareness as he/she receives input from multiple sensors that are also being fed to higher command headquarters the agent can successively interdict the ground movement of illegal immigrants, drug gangs, and potential terrorists with much less risk than previously has been the case. An agent can achieve better field of vision than ever before using increased stand-off techniques while observing from secure hide positions that masks the vehicle from detection as the mast system is raised rapidly over the masking terrain feature. This affords the agents and their superiors greater flexibility to close and engage with potential targets at a point and time of their choosing as opposed to the prevailing situation where either a lone agent serendipitously happens upon a target or is forced to respond without back-up because connectivity between the deployed agent and headquarters is absent.

Again, this strategy does not suggest a complete cessation of illegal access across our borders. But it does change the character of the operating concept to one that is active and seizes the initiative. It puts the tools in the hands of the personnel that truly need it while providing a total situational awareness for regional senior leaders to more effectively choke off access routes through their AO. It doesn't necessarily eschew use of some of the more exotic and pricey tools that are currently being employed. It just affords a better, more efficient, and consequently less costly application of these capabilities optimizing their ability to support the overall strategy. The bottom line - - proliferate the battlespace with highly mobile, cost effective vehicular QuickMast systems connected to video input from multiple aerial platforms to include the newer and cheaper UAVs, and link all into an integrated system backhaul and receive site system that ties in all of the key CBP command echelons in a respective region.

Make no doubt about it. This is a battle we are fighting. Rounds may not be going off in the volume that combat operations in Iraq or Afghanistan are. But the threat is just as wily, the risks to the operators nearly as great, and the threat it poses is just as significant. The sooner we start fighting it that way, the sooner we will see improvement in our execution of this critical mission. And the first step is to approach it as if it is combat which starts with the right strategy and concept of operations.

###