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## Drug Cartel Research Exemplifies Collaborative Power of Alumni

Center for Homeland Defense and Security

Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California

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# Drug Cartel Research Exemplifies Collaborative Power of Alumni

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As Bentley Nettles began researching the Sinaloa Drug Cartel he ran into roadblocks in mining the needed information.

Fortunately for Nettles, he was able to tap into the expertise network that comes with being an alumnus of the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security by enlisting former classmates Anthony Cox and David Gomez for assistance.

The result is Nettles' written analysis of the Sinaloa Cartel that applies a military planning approach known as "Concept to Task Tool" in a novel way and an effort that highlights the collaborative brain trust of CHDS alumni.

Nettles, a colonel with the Texas National Guard, is currently a fellow at Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. In seeking some of the information needed for the paper, he reached out to Gomez, who is the FBI assistant agent in charge in Seattle, and Cox, who is all hazards assessment officer in Arizona.

"The ability to collaborate with other NPS graduates and other homeland security professionals made it a better paper than it would have been otherwise," Nettles said.

Cox provided assistance as a research assistant and looked into operations, trafficking and violent incidents by the cartel. He credited his CHDS background for the success of the collaboration.

"Without the CHDS experience, I don't believe that a military officer, a senior federal law enforcement agency and a state hazard analyst would ever come together to work on a project that kicks the can forward in addressing Southwest border security and the threat from Mexican drug trafficking organizations," Cox said.

The paper was an exercise in applying what is known as the Concept to Task Tool, or CTT. The CTT is typically used by military planners to provide an independent review of a plan or order by others within the organization, also known as a "blue team," Nettles noted. Much of the paper explains the process and informational requirements for utilizing this planning tool.

In this case, he applied the tool to an enemy plan — the Sinaloa Cartel — to identify its mission and necessary components for the cartel to do its work. Such information can help decision-makers better combat the cartel.

"The cartel is a criminal enterprise. Those organizations have certain dependencies they rely upon which makes them potentially vulnerable to us impacting those operations," Nettles said.

Dependencies identified in the paper include weapons, the need for smuggling routes, product supply, transport capability, business capacity, intelligence and, identified as the biggest dependency, communications.

Another area of operational necessity for the cartel is a local work force. Historical ties and a lack of economic opportunity lure locals to work for the well-paying cartels. Job creations would go a long way to hindering the cartel's operations.



"That is something that, if we were assisting the Mexican government, should be the focus of our efforts," Nettles observed. "I think offering education and jobs other than working for the cartel could be a target of opportunity."

The paper fulfills service school requirements for Nettles that allow personnel to progress in rank. Nettles is currently the general counsel for the Texas National Guard.

Nettles hopes the paper will spur more research about the potential of using the CTT in a different way.

"My goal is get it into academia where people may make suggestion on how to use this tool more effectively," Nettles said. "Using skill sets from one discipline and applying it to another, sometimes you can make dramatic breakthroughs."

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