*IGA-211:*

*Central Challenges of American National Security, Strategy, and the Press*

Graham Allison, David E. Sanger, and Derek Reveron  
CASE 2: HOMELAND SECURITY AND TRANSNATIONAL ACTORS

**Assigned: 17 September 2018**

**Due: 24 September 2018**

The situation below is entirely fictional. If there are material changes between now and when the memo is due, you are not required to take those into account.  
  
You are the Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs on the NSC staff.

**A New Attack**

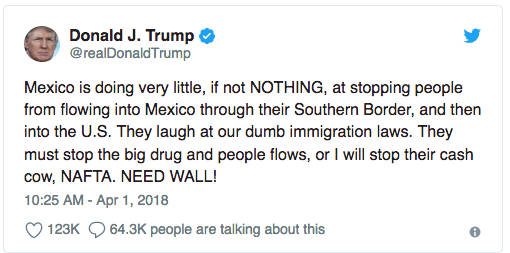
It is late September and you are barely two weeks into your new job as you arrive for lunch at the Bombay Club (two blocks away from the White House). Just as your food arrives, you receive an urgent message for you to head back to the office. By the time you get there, everyone is huddled around the TV. CNN reporters struggle to explain an attack underway at the North Star Mall in San Antonio, Texas.

The early reports suggest it is an apparent copycat attack of the September 2013 Westgate Mall terror incident in Nairobi, Kenya. “First reports are almost always wrong,” cautions Jim Sciutto, CNN’s Chief National Security Correspondent, but those reports suggest roughly a dozen heavily armed men entered the mall and opened fire on shoppers. Flurries of cell phone calls suggest crudely made grenades were rolled into some stores. The attackers timed their attack well, catching a host of families and young people eating brunch.  
  
Over the next two hours the situation grows more confused. SWAT personnel, who stormed the mall, suggest that several of the attackers appeared to be Mexican nationals. While most of the attackers were killed in firefights, two were taken into custody alive. At least 90 civilians are dead — in what appears to be the largest terror attack in the United States since September 11, 2001 – with hundreds more wounded (including police). The two surviving attackers are not cooperating with authorities. One speaks Arabic; the other speaks Spanish.  
  
The attack was clearly made for television providing networks with a seemingly endless supply of footage: wounded civilians streaming out of the mall, SWAT personnel storming the building, and cell phone images and videos from shoppers inside the mall.

A resurgent ISIS takes to Twitter to claim credit, praising the attackers as “soldiers of the caliphate in America holding the West accountable for its oppressive actions in Iraq and Syria.”

By nightfall, the shooting is finally over. President Trump condemns the attack on Twitter as his team prepares an address to the nation from the Oval Office. He assures the country that intelligence and police forces are on high alert, but says there is no evidence that additional attacks are imminent, though the point is drowned out once he goes off-script to speak his mind:

“We are told that the attackers were terrorists and members of ISIS,” Mr. Trump says, and adds: “I will not let this attack go unanswered. Everyone knows we need to build the wall. We need better security, we need our fantastic military, and we need the police to enforce law and order like they haven’t been able to do for years. Mexico needs to take control and stop these criminals by any means necessary. These murderers and gangs hurt Americans every day. No more. We need the wall and we cannot wait any longer.”

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**Danger Close to Home**

After a long night, you are in the Situation Room for the 6:00 am briefing the next day. National Security Advisor John Bolton chairs the meeting with Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats and CIA Director Gina Haspel to give the President and his team their best assessment of events. Almost all the details that follow have been broadcast — along with other rumors — during the non-stop television coverage. Here are the most vital points from the briefing:

* The attackers are a multinational group: Syrian, Iraqi, Yemeni, Pakistani, and Mexican. A number of members of the group have connections to ISIS.
* The terrorists planned the attack from a safe house in Tamaulipas, a Mexican state that borders the U.S. Large swaths of Tamaulipas are largely controlled by Los Zetas, one of the most powerful and most dangerous drug cartels operating in Mexico. Los Zetas has made significant inroads in corrupting and intimidating Mexican state officials and police.
* The attackers crossed the border through routes controlled by Los Zetas, with the aid of coyotes, who smuggle drugs and undocumented individuals across the border for money.
* Once across the border, the attackers spent four days with a small group of Mexican nationals who had been living illegally in Laredo, Texas. These accomplices provided the assault weapons and ammunition used in the attack. Early reports (found in an ongoing ATF investigation) suggest that these illegal immigrants had been facilitating the smuggling of U.S. assault rifles to Los Zetas across the border, and charged the ISIS-affiliated attackers a premium for providing the arms here in the U.S.

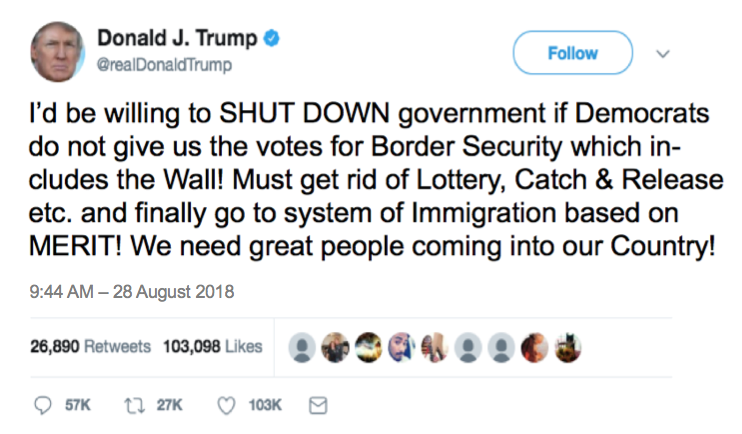
There are also unknowns looming:

* Tracing the calls made by the suspected attackers, NSA analysts and the National Counterterrorism Center believe that two or three additional ISIS safe houses exist in Tamaulipas. Chatter from ISIS indicates that two additional U.S. shopping malls may be targeted in the near future. The location and timing of these potential attacks is unknown.
* After the June 2013 capture of Los Zetas leader Miguel Trevino Morales (known as Z-40), the cartel began to unravel. Two years later, Morales’s brother (and new leader of Zetas) Omar Trevino Morales (known as Z-42) was also arrested. During this period, a rival cartel known as the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (JNGC), rose in size and prominence and encroached on Los Zetas’ domain. Some in the room argue JNGC is now the strongest cartel in Mexico and may have driven rivals to new methods. The extent to which Zetas leadership today exercises operational control over members of the group is unclear; while the Los Zetas captain for Laredo, TX is clearly on tape talking about payoffs from “the Arabs”, it is unknown whether Los Zetas leadership was aware of any of this, or that any part of Los Zetas actively and intentionally aided the ISIS attackers in carrying out this attack.
* This attack comes during a period of transition for the Mexican government; the current Mexican President Nieto lost reelection this summer to left-wing candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who will become president in December. President Nieto offered sympathy and said he would make the full resources of the Mexican state available to pursue any leads in his country, but you’re concerned that an outgoing president may have less domestic influence to assist the U.S. effort. President Obrador doesn’t assume office until 1 December.
* Finally, Bolton is getting calls from a reporter at the *New York Tribune* who claims to have copies of NSA reports on recent calls from Mexican officials discussing the ISIS presence in Mexico. The reporter plans to publish these documents within the next couple days.

**Public Outrage**

Members of Congress who previously led the charge for an “airtight border with Mexico” pounced on the opportunity to advance their argument, while other implied or explicitly accused the Trump administration of exacerbating border violence. Many are calling for a swift, unilateral response inside Mexico’s borders. “When the Afghan government provided sanctuary to terrorists plotting against America, we invaded their country,” one senator said. “When we find terrorists operating in Pakistan’s tribal areas, we send in Special Operations Forces or conduct missile strikes. How can we overlook a terrorist safe haven this close to home?”

Unsurprisingly, the President is actively commenting on the event via Twitter. Cable news is also replaying many of his comments from the campaign from last year, and a recent Tweet at the end of August in which he talked about the wall:



“I told you that when Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best,” Trump said at a subsequent event. “They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime, and now we see they bring murderers and terrorists who kill U.S. citizens. People lost their minds when we separated parents and children when they intentionally crossed the border illegally…just like the terrorists. Washington never gets it until it’s too late.”

**The Assignment**

John Bolton calls you into his office and says that the President is convening a full National Security Council meeting in five hours. In preparation for the meeting, he wants a **one-page** memo describing three distinct options for responding to the attack, embracing both the short-term response and the long-term view of America’s complex relationship with Mexico.

“The President said we cannot allow Americans to be attacked on their own soil, and he meant it,” he said. “Central Command will deal with what’s left of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. But that leaves Mexico — and on that one, we’ve got a huge problem. NORTHCOM needs to dust off contingency plans,” he said, “but we need to shape the operation’s objectives.”

Bolton tells you that a decisive military option needs to be on the table: “The President may not have a grasp of military operations like some of us, but he has a point: if an attack like this came from Yemen, Somalia, or the FATA, the drones would already be in the air. How can we act less decisively when the threat is so close to home?” He continues, “At the same time, we must remember that Mexico isn’t Pakistan — it’s a functioning democracy, a major trading partner, and an oil supplier. If we strike inside Mexico, we will have big, big political problems here.”

“Make sure you consider all options, which includes one military option (unilateral or bilateral). The President is already being pilloried for his fiery rhetoric by some of our partners. We need results if the President is going to find any middle ground for a workable option. A vague promise by Mexican authorities to ‘investigate’ won’t stand for the President.”

“By the way,” Bolton says, “the President does understand the way we deal with this incident will affect our relations with Mexico for years to come. Don’t send him a memo that ignores the bigger issues like trade and immigration that he’ll have to deal with after we get through this crisis. The analysis should address the following questions:”

* What role should the U.S. play in Mexico’s war with the drug cartels? If we want the Mexican government to change its approach, what leverage do we have to convince them?
* What do we do about the fact that a tiny fraction of the more than 11 million undocumented individuals already living in the United States may pose an ongoing threat? (Bolton reminds you that you are not a domestic policy advisor, but asks that in making your recommendation you are at least aware of the implications your recommendations may have for the administration’s immigration reform efforts)
* How do we balance security, economic, political, and cultural ties with Mexico?

Wrapping up your answers to address all these dimensions in a brief memo with three basic alternative strategies toward Mexico is a lot, the National Security Advisor observes. But the President believes that when facing big challenges, it is essential to ‘swing for the fences’.

Separately, as an appendix to the outline, Bolton also wants your help in responding to the *Tribune* reporter. He points out, and you agree, that publishing the NSA documents, drawn from intercepts of its leaders, would significantly embarrass the Mexican government. The documents demonstrate beyond any doubt that the Mexican government is not in control of its own territory. And they make clear that the U.S. has built an extensive spying and monitoring network inside Mexico, far larger than previously thought.

But while publication of the documents could complicate any attempt to secure the Mexican government’s help in responding to this threat, the embarrassment could also spur the Mexican government to action. And of course, you need to consider any threat to ongoing operations — though the *Tribune* insists these documents are all historical, more like the Pentagon Papers than WikiLeaks. Bolton wants you to weigh all these considerations and recommend whether or not the United States should demand that the *Tribune* hold back publication, and if so for how long, and how he can persuade the *Tribune* to comply. He wants a half page of bulleted talking points for him to use when he returns the reporter’s call.

**Logistics**

This assignment calls for a **one-page** Strategic Options Memo outline and **half page** of bulleted talking points for Bolton’s call with the reporter. You are permitted (not required) to attach an appendix no longer than one half page that identifies questions of fact or analysis that you do not know the answer to, but believe an individual writing the memo in the real world would. These questions should relate to your analysis and/or recommendations. List the questions and then provide some indication as to who, where, or how these questions would likely be answered.

As with all assignments, **please write your Harvard University ID number** on your outline rather than your name to ensure impartial grading.

Although all course assistants are available to answer questions, the CA primarily responsible for this case is **Dan Kurtenbach** (dkurt@mit.edu). Dan will hold office hours on **Thursday, September 20 from 4:15-6:30pm in Littauer 330 (Herzog Room) *and* by appointment (preferably Friday between 10am-6pm at HKS).**

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**Assigned: 17 September 2018**

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**Required (159 pgs)**

*U.S. Foreign Policy – Present and Future Strategies and Objectives (74 pgs)*

* Reveron, Derek S. *Exporting Security,* pages 1-11, 17-34, 43-53 (38 pgs)
* Petraeus, David and Robert Zoellick. “[North America: Time for a New Focus](http://www.cfr.org/north-america/north-america/p33536),” *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 2014, pgs. 42-50 (9 pgs)
* Robinson, Lori. “[2018 NORAD and USNORTHCOM SASC Posture Hearing](http://www.northcom.mil/Portals/28/Robinson_02-15-18%20SASC%20Testimony.pdf?ver=2018-02-15-105546-867), February 15, 2018. Pgs.16-18 (3 pgs).
* McBride, James and Mohammed Aly Sergie, “[NAFTA’s Economic Impact](https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/naftas-economic-impact),” Council on Foreign Relations, October 4, 2017. (13 pgs)
* Blackwill, Robert D., and Jennifer M. Harris. "The Lost Art of Economic Statecraft Restoring an American Tradition." *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 2 (2016): 99-110. (11 pgs)

*Mexico’s Drug War (26 pgs)*

* Logan, Samual. “[A Profile of Los Zetas](https://ctc.usma.edu/a-profile-of-los-zetas-mexicos-second-most-powerful-drug-cartel/),” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, February 2012. (2 pgs)
* Nugent, Ciara. “[Mexico is Suffering its Bloodiest Year in Modern History. Here’s Why](http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-mexico-los-cabos-violence-20170901-htmlstory.html),” *Time,* 28 June 2018. (5 pgs)
* Fredrick, James. “[Mexico’s New President has a Radical Plan to End the Drug War](https://www.vox.com/2018/8/15/17690420/mexico-president-amlo-drug-war-cartels-violence-legalization).” *Vox,* 15 August 2018. (11 pgs)
* Lee, Brianna. “[Backgrounder: Mexico’s Drug War](http://www.cfr.org/mexico/mexicos-drug-war/p13689),” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 25 May 2017. (8 pgs)

*US-Mexico Security (59 pgs)*

* Al-Jazeera, “[America's Guns: Arming Mexico's Cartels](https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2018/03/america-guns-arming-mexico-cartels-180320132511305.html),” March 20, 2018 (2 pgs).
* Bersin, Alan and Nate Bruggeman. “[Border Police, an Opportunity for AMLO](https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/border-police-opportunity-amlo),” *El Universal,* 16 August 2018. (4 pgs)
* US Customs and Border Protection. “[Southwest Border Migration FY2017-FY2018](https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration),” 8 August 2017. (1 pg)
* Seelke, Clare Ribando and Kristin Finklea. “[U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond](https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41349.pdf),” *Congressional Research Service*, 29 June 2017 pgs. 2-23. (21 pgs)
* Phippen, J. Weston. “[Mexico Plays the ‘China Card](https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/mexcio-nafta-plan-b/538620/),” *The Atlantic,* 4 September 2017. (4 pgs)
* Felbab-Brown, Vanda. “[The Wall: The real costs of a barrier between the United States and Mexico](https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-wall-the-real-costs-of-a-barrier-between-the-united-states-and-mexico/),” *Brookings Institution,* August 2017. (22 pgs)
* Wilson, Reid. “[Texas officials warn of immigrants with terrorist ties crossing southern border](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2015/02/26/texas-officials-warn-of-immigrants-with-terrorist-ties-crossing-southern-border/),” *Washington Post,* 26 February 2015. (5 pgs)

**Recommended**

* Ashby, Paul. "[U.S. National Security in the Western Hemisphere](http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190680015.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190680015-e-40)," The Oxford Handbook of U.S. National Security. Oxford University Press, 2018-07-26.
* Reveron, Derek S. and Nikolas K. Gvosdev. "[National Interests and Grand Strategy](http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190680015.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190680015-e-3)." In *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. National Security*, Chapter 3. Oxford University Press, 2018. (18 pgs)
* Woody, Christopher. “[Mexican officials are ready to stop helping the US fight terrorism and drug trafficking to get back at Trump](https://www.businessinsider.com/mexico-officials-propose-end-to-security-cooperation-over-trump-policy-2018-6),” 23 June 2018. (2 pgs)
* O’Neil, Shannon. “[Lopez Obrador and the Future of Mexican Democracy](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/mexico/2018-07-02/lopez-obrador-and-future-mexican-democracy),” *Foreign Affairs,* 2 July 2018. (8 pgs)
* Agren, David. “[Mexico after El Chapo: New Generation Fights for Control of the Cartel](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/05/el-chapo-sinaloa-drug-cartel-mexico),” *The Guardian,* 5 May 2017. (3 pgs)
* Summers, Lawrence. “[Mexico isn’t taking Trump’s threat that seriously anymore](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/08/24/lawrence-summers-mexico-isnt-taking-trumps-threats-that-seriously-anymore/?utm_term=.1aa0b9c78562),” *Washington Post*, 24 August 2017. (2 pgs)
* Barbaro, Michael and Alex Burns, Maggie Habreman, and Kirk Semple. “[Highlights of Donald Trump’s Immigration Speech and Mexico Trip](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/31/us/politics/donald-trump-mexico.html?_r=0),” New York Times. 31 August 2016. (3 pgs)
* Gonzalez-Barrera, Ana and Jens Manuel Krogstad. “[What we know about illegal immigration from Mexico](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/15/what-we-know-about-illegal-immigration-from-mexico/),” *Pew Research Forum*, 15 July 2015. (4 pgs)
* Neuman, William. “[As Drug Kingpins Fall in Mexico, Cartels Fracture and Violence Surges](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/13/world/americas/as-mexico-arrests-kingpins-cartels-splinter-and-violence-spikes.html),” *New York Times,* 12 August 2015. (6 pgs)
* Wilson, Christopher and Eugenio Weigend. “[Plan Tamaulipas: A New Security Strategy for a Troubled State](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/New_Security_Strategy_Tamaulipas.pdf),” *Wilson Center*, 9 October 2014, pgs. 7-17. (11 pgs)
* [“A Closer and More Productive Economic and Trade Relationship between Mexico and the United States,”](http://mex-eua.sre.gob.mx/images/stories/PDF/DEANeng.pdf) *Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations*, October 2013. (2 pgs)