



**Operation Lone Star Taskforce Update
&
Recommendations For A New State Initiative**

2023



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a result of the wave of transnational criminal activity invading Texas in 2021, Governor Abbott provided relief to local jurisdictions through the Operation Lone Star grant. In order to maximize the effectiveness of the funds provided, the Goliad County Sheriff's Office set out to ensure coordinated enforcement efforts at the local level. Section one of this document is a brief overview of what participating agencies have done as a result of the OLS funding provided by the Texas Legislature and Governor Abbott.

I. OPERATION LONE STAR TASKFORCE UPDATE

A. Formation

Shortly after receiving funding from the Governor's Office, Sheriff Boyd hired John Davis of Jackson County to act as Commander of Taskforce efforts under OLS. Additionally, three interdictors and an intel/investigator were hired for the sole purpose of enforcing laws pertaining to transnational criminal activity.

In order to maximize the use of funds provided, the Goliad County Sheriff's Office initiated the formation of a taskforce to work in a cooperative effort. Knowing that we lacked the ability to solve the illegal entry problem at the border as local entities, we set out to create an environment through intelligence and enforcement efforts that would deny cartels and their operatives the ability to freely operate within our region of the state.

The Operation Lone Star Taskforce has now grown to include the following agencies:

Goliad Co. SO	Bee Co. SO	Live Oak Co. SO
McMullen Co. SO	Wilson Co. SO	Wharton Co. SO
Jackson Co. SO	Edna PD	Refugio Co. SO
San Patricio Co. SO	Kleberg Co. SO	Kleberg Co. Attorney Taskforce
Kingsville PD	Brooks Co. SO	Falfurrias PD
Cuero PD	Yoakum PD	Gonzales Co. SO
Gonzales PD	Nixon PD	Zapata County SO
US Border Patrol	Dept. of Homeland Security	US Coast Guard

B. Methodology of the Operation Lone Star Taskforce

After beginning our combined efforts in March of 2022, we quickly began to understand that Mexican cartels were utilizing other organizations (contractors) within Texas to oversee and coordinate their smuggling efforts. These contractors then employed lesser organizations, or subcontractors to insulate their operations from detection and prosecution.

Thanks to our relationship with the Department of Homeland Security (HSI) office in Victoria, the OLS Taskforce was soon receiving and disseminating real-time intelligence obtained by HSI by informants within the contractor and subcontractor groups. This information was combined with investigative material from debriefs of smugglers and illegal aliens arrested by OLS Taskforce member agencies, data revealed from search warrants on phones recovered from bailouts and arrested individuals, and license plate reader data. As a result of this intelligence gathering, the OLS Taskforce began to form a greater understanding of the



operational habits of cartel operatives at different levels and went as far as placing trackers on vehicles used by smuggling operations.

Interdiction deputies and officers shared the actionable intelligence throughout the Taskforce via an app. This real-time intelligence sharing was used to intercept scouts, intercept load vehicles, and disrupt pickup areas used to load illegal aliens into vehicles.

Abandoning the traditional method of law enforcement agencies, which usually involved arresting a smuggler caught in the act while releasing the illegal aliens to Border Patrol, the Goliad County Sheriff's Office OLS unit began conducting long-term investigations into the organizations. This usually involved bringing in HSI to initiate a federal case while GCSO assisted and ran a parallel state case for prosecution. As is shown in the following section, this led to a more effective way of handling smuggling cases.

Specific cases have been highlighted in previous documents submitted.

C. Result of the Effort

The result of the obtaining and sharing of real-time intelligence provided several benefits. First, we were able to identify numerous members of the criminal organizations, what they drove, where they conducted business, the routes they utilized, and when they were on the road conducting smuggling operations. In some cases, we learned where they lived and where the businesses were that they utilized to provide false legitimacy to their finances. With this intelligence in hand, we began coordinated multi-jurisdictional enforcement actions that apprehended and disrupted criminal activity.

Eventually the efforts resulted in the identifying of the primary smuggling organization operating out of the RGV sector (Name withheld due to an ongoing investigation). This organization was responsible for overseeing all major smuggling efforts in the area from Roma, east to the Gulf of Mexico, from Roma north to Falfurrias, and back across from Falfurrias to the Gulf of Mexico. This organization was also responsible for the taxation in this region for multiple cartels.

The disruption of this organization began with the OLS Taskforce enforcement efforts and led to them altering their path from the RGV sector of the border to Houston. The Taskforce denied direct passage from the border to Houston via main roadways such as Hwy 77, Hwy 281, and Hwy 59. Within months of our collective efforts, the organization began travelling to San Antonio and taking I-10 to Houston. This was a more costly and time-consuming means of smuggling, which impacted the profit margin for this organization and their subcontractors.

With the intelligence about the new smuggling routes in hand, the OLS Taskforce refocused on the routes from pickup locations which lead to San Antonio. In a short period of time, member agencies intercepted and arrested smugglers taking the new routes. We also intercepted and arrested smugglers from subcontractor organizations working under the primary organization.

During late 2022, the Goliad County Sheriff's Office, HSI, and other agencies from the Houston area executed search and arrest warrants on upper and mid management members of the primary organization in Houston. This action, in combination with the arrest of many lesser smugglers, led to the immediate reduction in smuggling activity in the jurisdictions participating in the OLS Taskforce. Goliad County Sheriff's Office then began a clean-up operation on other smaller smuggling organizations and executed arrest and search warrants in the Houston area



with the help of the US Marshal's Office. More search and arrest warrants in the Houston area are to come.

D. Effects of the Effort

After the long efforts of the OLS Taskforce agencies, we noticed a drastic reduction in smuggling apprehensions in our areas of responsibility. Upon meeting with Border Patrol, we were advised that illegal alien apprehensions in the RGV for January 2023 were at the lowest level since President Trump was in office. They advised that there were three primary reasons for this:

- The formation of and enforcement activities of the OLS Taskforce disrupted smuggling operations in the area and caused the smugglers to select new routes on their way to Houston.
- Once the smugglers began altering their routes, the OLS Taskforce identified the new routes and adapted enforcement actions. This denied smuggling organizations access to their secondary travel patterns.
- Federal prosecutors in Corpus began accepting smuggling cases, creating an additional punitive deterrent for smugglers.

Additionally, HSI agents explained that the arrest of so many management level primary organization members caused a void in the organizational structure. As a result, the newly promoted members decided that in order to continue their operation, it was in their best interest to move west. This organization is now operating along the border, west of Eagle Pass, as far out as Terrel County.

The reality of this effort is that Operation Lone Star funding has made the citizens in our region of Texas safer from cartel criminal activity.

E. Future Enforcement Actions

Recently, Sheriff Coe of Kinney County sent out a written request for assistance due to the overwhelming smuggling activity in his county. This was followed by a similar request from Sheriff Cleveland in Terrel County.

Beginning this week, the OLS Taskforce is conducting a planned enforcement operation in Kinney County. This initial operation will have 35 deputies, dispatchers, and jailers from the OLS Taskforce and will be a test run to work out the logistics for more lengthy operation to come. If manpower and funding allow, it is our plan to provide assistance to Terrel County in the near future as well.

While we will be assisting Kinney County in months to come, we are already aware of an up-and-coming organization with the potential to fill the vacuum left by the primary organization. Working with Border Patrol intelligence personnel, we are developing a plan to place trackers on their vehicles and take the group down before they can become more difficult to dismantle.



II. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NEW APPROACH

In this section, I will address what I have witnessed as a law enforcement officer with twenty-nine years of experience. Stating this, I understand that the Governor and Texas Legislature have to give consideration to things that I do not have to consider or do not understand. However, through my contacts at various levels of State government, I also know that the Governor and Texas Legislature are often only provided with information that benefits certain State agencies or organizations. This leads to decisions being made without the key decision makers knowing all the facts.

A. The Current Methodology & Why It Is Failing

At the State level, the method for handling the border issue has been to treat it as an immigration problem. This thought process lends to the belief and operational mentality that this is a federal issue with few enforcement options at the state level. Utilizing this train of thought is a method that provides no real avenue of success in defeating the transnational criminal organizations we face. We must abandon the operational mindset of mirroring the federal approach to this problem and replace it with a new method that focuses on the use of state law to dismantle cartel operations in Texas.

The Goliad County Sheriff's Office is gifted with a prosecutor who is willing to prosecute criminals to the fullest extent of the law. As a result, the GCSO files Engaging In Organized Criminal Activity on drivers and illegal alien passengers alike. We do not turn illegal aliens over to Border Patrol until prosecution and/or time served is completed. Unfortunately, this is not the case in all jurisdictions, which leads to an advantage for criminal organizations who quickly learn which counties will or will not prosecute them and their human merchandise.

Historically, problems at the border were temporarily resolved by sending the Texas Rangers to use whatever means necessary to bring an end to criminal activities and violence. More recently, the issue has been tasked to DPS. Unfortunately, the most recent methodology has led to the catching of illegal aliens who are then released into the United States anyway.

Currently, if DPS encounters a smuggler, the smuggler is arrested. However, most illegal aliens encountered by DPS are turned over to Border Patrol. Some are deported, but many are released into the US by the federal government.

The methodology currently in use by state law enforcement is counterproductive. We must keep in mind that the object of any smuggling operation is to make money. Mexican cartels smuggle a variety of commodities such as drugs and slaves in order to maintain a revenue stream. Illegal aliens are smuggled into the US for an initial fee. Once they reach Houston, the illegal aliens discover that in order to be free they must pay additional money to the cartels. The vast majority cannot afford this second payment, as their families have exhausted their savings making the initial payment to the cartel. I found a letter in a house for sex slaves that described how it takes eight to thirteen years to purchase your freedom once you are smuggled into the US.

By turning illegal aliens over to federal agents, there are two primary outcomes. One is deportation to Mexico or their country of origin, where the illegal aliens are then back in the



hands of cartels and smuggled into the US again. The other is for federal agents to process and release them into the US, where they continue into the custody of the cartel and their operatives in the US. Either way, the cartels continue to generate revenue.

As long as the cartels continue to generate revenue through smuggling activity, there is no true deterrent to conducting their illicit business in Texas. Since the current methodology of conducting law enforcement operations associated with transnational criminal activity does not deny cartels a reliable revenue stream, we should not expect acceptable results from these efforts.

B. Recommendations For Another Methodology

In an effort to deny transnational criminal organizations a reliable revenue stream in Texas, I recommend the following actions:

- Reconstitute the Texas Department of Homeland Security – This organization should be a stand-alone agency with the specific mission of denying transnational criminal organizations with the ability to conduct business in Texas, thereby creating a more secure border between Texas and Mexico. While this organization should work in cooperation with other state agencies like DPS and the Texas Attorney General's Office, it should be independent in order to provide flexibility and prevent stagnation due to established institutional limitations and politics.

The Texas Department of Homeland Security should consist of interdiction officers, investigators, intelligence agents, prosecutors, and support staff. It could also be augmented with Task Force Officers (TFO) who work for local agencies but are assigned to work part or full time with the agency.

Like federal agencies, the Texas Department of Homeland Security should be authorized to adopt cases from local agencies for investigation and prosecution. This could prevent the problem of a lack of consistency in the prosecution of criminals associated with organized crime.

- Create border prosecution specialty courts and districts. These courts would have appointed or elected judges and would be responsible for adjudicating cases presented by the Texas Department of Homeland Security.
- Intelligence/Information functions should be placed under the authority of the Texas Department of Homeland Security, with an emphasis of sharing **actionable** intelligence with partner agencies. The current means of intelligence sharing consists of local agencies reporting dated information to DPS. This information is then processed and sent out in limited quantity to local agencies through the JOIC. Unfortunately, almost none of the information is actionable. Sheriff's Offices on the Gulf Coast do not need to know that someone in El Paso is passing hot checks, or that someone is stealing packages off porches in San Marcos. There needs to be a focus on providing actionable intelligence to agencies who assign liaisons and participate in enforcement and investigative efforts with the state agency.



- In the past, there were multiple narcotics taskforces across the state. These were eventually absorbed by DPS and done away with. This concept should be started again. However, if this is done there should be funding provided for administrative/financial oversight in order ensure funds are managed properly. Local agencies should be able to come together on a temporary or semi-permanent basis in order to target specific criminal activity associated with organized crime. These taskforces should work in conjunction with the Texas Department of Homeland Security, DPS, etc., and should be required to share intel with state partners if they are to receive funding. However, each taskforce should work under their own direction but within the scope of the overall mission set by the Governor's Office and Texas DHS. This will prevent operational stagnation due to various factors facing state level agencies.

III. Conclusion

While Governor Abbott and the Texas Legislature have provided funding and a mission of securing the Texas/Mexico border, efforts thus far have been too disjointed to accomplish the goal. DPS has intercepted and arrested many smugglers who are prosecuted as a result of their efforts. They have also intercepted and prevented many drugs from being sold in the US. The Operation Lone Star Taskforce, in cooperation with Border Patrol and HSI greatly diminished the smuggling operations north of and within the RGV sector. However, for all the good law enforcement has done, we have failed to bring the issue to an end or get it reduced to a manageable level state wide.

In order to succeed in our mission, we must ignore the federal aspects of the immigration process, avoid conducting enforcement efforts that fall under federal jurisdiction and could provide federal authorities with the opportunity to prosecute state or local government employees and officials, and concentrate on enforcing state laws that will deny criminal organizations with the ability to remain profitable in Texas. Only then will we deter transnational criminal activity and begin to dismantle the existing infrastructure that cartels have established throughout Texas.

While it is beyond both my authority and capacity to handle immigration matters, it is my desire to see transnational criminal organizations pushed out of Texas through aggressive and innovative enforcement actions at the state and local level.

God Bless Texas

"...For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

Luke 12:48