

## The Silent Watchman

### Part 9 Expectations

Increasingly sophisticated management  
advances the narco-terrorism nexus

WASHINGTON, DC – Unattributed reports apparently leaked to an EPS reporter sometime in the last week have hit the headlines with an urgency that appears to have law enforcement agencies scrambling to learn more about their origin and authenticity. Spokespeople for agencies from border byways to cabinet secretaries are being bombarded with questions concerning the reports published and broadcast by major news outlets throughout North America and Europe. Responses to questions have been guarded or evasive, thus fueling the curiosity of reporters and media commentators.

Previously

“Your fine bulls seem restless,” said Carlos Cassidea as he poured another round of drinks from a chilled pitcher of refreshing sangria for himself and the Sinaloan. “Are they aware of something we should take note of?”

“Yes,” replied the Sinaloan in a soft baritone. “They are sensitive to the constant whir of the surveillance UAVs buzzing around the estancia. The reason you have not set foot out from under a roof or canopy during your visit is that we are under constant view of the authorities, both Mexican and American. The UAVs know that two warm bodies are sitting under these horticulture shades, but they cannot be certain who we are. If they knew with certainty our identities, the next and last sensation we might feel might be the brief realization of our own mortality as we dissolve in the heat of an exploding Hellfire.”

“Don’t they make you a bit nervous?”

“Somewhat, but their presence advances a notion drifting in and out of my mind that I want to discuss with you. I think we have a new weapon at our disposal, a weapon that will send the Americans into paroxysms of confusion, scurrying hither and yon searching for needles in haystacks wherever the weapons are employed.

“I want to arm unmanned aerial vehicles, the types that are becoming popular in aerial surveys, surveillance and if we can trust what we see on American TV, the delivery

of small packages, and send them with improvised explosive devices to create chaos and wear down their law enforcement and border guards tracing large numbers of small bombs scattered throughout selected cities. When they are exhausted and at their wit's end, we will slip our shipments through revealed pathways they have already cleared or haven't the resources to cover. The R&D facilities in Spain are perfecting IEDs for delivery by UAVs already on the market. People in major cities in America and Europe are becoming inured to their presence. They are immunizing their authorities by making such vehicles so commonplace that, at least initially, our efforts to plant the seeds of panic and overwhelm their response resources should achieve a measure of success. As with the incursion at Nogales, we will catch them off guard, and learn valuable lessons regarding their response capabilities and procedures. We will engage them with their own technology that they are unable to govern."

In his usual deferential manner, Cassidea inquired, "Please explain how you see such a condition occurring?"

"The likely success of the venture is based upon the high expectation that Americans, and others, will pursue their technologies and entrepreneurial tendencies to illogical extremes. They will saturate their skies with an array of working and perhaps recreational UAVs. The Europeans are advancing their commercial applications while the Americans debate regulations to manage their air space. Soon, American entrepreneurial spirit, and their tendencies toward rugged individualism, will lead to experimentation with UAVs by amateurs as well as commercial research and development. UAVs are already being used in aerial surveys and surveillance, and model airplane enthusiasts are pushing ahead with their small-scale recreational applications. A few weeks ago, a major online retailer demonstrated on national television use of the devices to deliver small packages to their customers. In 2004, NASA published a detailed report on the future of UAVs; many of the uses projected in the report have been advanced by their scientists, engineers and technicians to the point of commercial viability. The American government still debates regulations, but they will not be able to constrain their business interests. And we have agents in America who can influence decision makers in their government and industry. The highly competitive American captains of industry and commerce will strive to keep up with and surpass the Europeans

and Asians. Remember how the Russians drove them to the moon with their simple chirping Sputnik.

“In the meantime, our plant in Bilboa is advancing both aerial vehicles and small, very powerful explosive devices that can be delivered within the payload constraints on current survey and surveillance UAVs. The devices are being tested covertly in Africa.

“We are able to do these things now, but we have not yet devised strategies for their employment. It will be your mission to work out such strategies, tactics and logistics, first to test the feasibility of employing UAVs to advance our interests in the European and North American theaters; then, if your results show promise, to apply them to enhance our enterprise.”

“A tall order,” replied Carlos.

“A tall order indeed; but I think you are up to it, and I think the benefits could be quite striking for all of us. Prove the proposition, one way or the other.”

Devon Zander, totally immersed in catching up with his paper work, reached for his secure satellite phone and tersely answered its commanding vibration: “Yeah?”

Malcolm Garfield began without salutation. “That Sinaloan SOB is up to something. If we knew who is with him right now, we might be able to make a decent guess what it is. Hell, we might even ask Homeland Security to visit a bit of hellfire on him. If it was some raghead terrorist palavering with his staff, Homeland or DOD would take out the whole hacienda; collateral damage acceptable. War on terror, war on drugs: If we were in the city, we’d just send in SWAT, and say ‘Oops’ if we got it wrong.”

“Don’t we have eyes on ‘em?”

“Daylight only. But they’re covering up pretty well. We see cars and trucks coming and going; but people ride behind tinted glass and move under cover. The satellite and UAV techies are all over it, but the comms and HUMINT wells are dry. The Sinaloan is running a very tight operation. Something is happening; the traffic and trade craft tell us that. But we haven’t got a clue about what they’re thinking.”

“OK Malcolm, put me on the official list for a couple or three weeks so I can look into this with an air of authority.”

“Already done, compadre. Keep in touch, and watch your back. Whatever the old reprobate is up to, it ain’t good for us.”

“Usual arrangements?”

“Roger that; someone will be around here 24/7.”

“Adios amigo.”

Within a fortnight, Carlos Cassidea was standing before the Sinaloan summarizing his lengthy presentation to the cartel leader and his executive council:

“The Nexis is currently resting comfortably, with nothing major looming in the near future. Terrorist organizations are planning, as always, and we are immersed in our own domestic and foreign ventures.

“They appear to have settled into a grassroots strategy with occasional major forays when offered high impact targets and manageable risks. But, though many of their capabilities are compatible with our’s, their ideological motives, and often their tactical operations, are at odds with our aims. They kill people and destroy property which often invites retaliation on a scale they cannot match. We want people to consume our products and pay handsomely in so doing. The large-scale destruction of property – government buildings, malls, hotels, for example – does not fit well with our sales, marketing and logistical operations. In the specific instance of the Jihadists, when they are in control their convictions do not promote use of our products in their societies; at best, they are sources of supply for our base materials, but the supply chains are long and vulnerable.

“We may wish to employ them from time to time if they offer something that does not visit upon us the same nature of response that they appear willing to absorb. It seems that the retaliatory actions taken by their targets contribute to their recruitment efforts, and so pay them a dividend. But, they are at war, really rather than figuratively, and I think we are better off confronting law enforcement in the war on drugs than defense departments in wars on terrorism.

“Increasingly, we are able to stand up at times and in places of our choosing against the ‘warrior cops,’ and our recruitment of soldiers with special operations training and experience combined with the people coming out of the four countries facility

provides cadre and leadership for our operations in the plazas and streets. These forces are critical to maintenance of our competitive position at home. Our intelligence, based almost entirely upon HUMINT, remains good; and, we are able to influence public policies and budgets through liaisons with government, industry and various social action groups. Although the legalization of medicinal and recreational uses of marijuana in Los Estados Unidos may be losing us street dollars now, the development of the retail markets and downstream effects of transitions into more highly addictive drugs coupled with increasingly potent prescription drugs will strengthen the demand for our more profitable products in the long run. For example, US FDA administrators are allowing the distribution of a new addictive prescription pain killer, Zohydro, though their own advisors recommend not releasing it for sale. Could it be that the \$3.5 billion in sales of hydrocodone since 2012 suggest the allure of the marketplace and strength of the worldwide pharmaceutical industry, an industry in which we have a foothold through our interests in Spain? Governments north of our border and elsewhere in the world will, we think, encounter significant difficulties with their own insatiable consumers, entrepreneurs and industrialists. We are being stressed at several points, but we are increasingly able to sustain and advance our market share both domestically and internationally.

“Finally, although our best products are not legal in the marketplace, they have a confirmed base of both users and promoters. People want them, will purchase them, and will advance their sale; and the commercial interests of the free market will supply their demands. We may wish not to risk this ‘good will’ by being identified with terrorists, by being tagged as their paymasters.

“For these reasons summarizing the detailed analyses in the attachments to our recommendations, we think the terror groups should be kept at arm’s length, employed occasionally when appropriate as contractors, perhaps giving them the appearance of partnership, on a case by case basis only. When active, they do create chaos and confusion, and consume resources that law enforcement agencies in America and Europe might rather use against us. Therefore, we recommend maintaining contact with them; but, we think concrete alliances are not in our best interests.”

Senor Cassidea stood quietly, awaiting the Sinaloan’s command.

“Gentlemen, Senor Cassidea’s report is interesting and appears to be thorough and well presented. But, in being so, it is long and quite detailed. Let us rest for a while and return to it after lunch. I think we may have a long afternoon ahead of us.”

Turning to face Carlos Cassidea, he continued: “Gracias, Carlos, and convey our thanks to your staff. Please stand by close this afternoon so that we may consult with you or your specialists if need be. And, impress upon them the vital necessity to stay well within the overhead cover. The very heavens have eyes upon us, as you know only too well. Tomorrow, be ready to brief us concerning your investigations into the employment of UAVs. This is a busy time for all of us; we must make good use of our time together.”

With the slightest of gestures, the Sinaloan dismissed Carlos Cassidea. After the door closed behind his chief of staff, the Sinaloan turned to his associates and said, “After lunch, we will reassemble here to review the report. Your thoughts concerning this nexis are important, so I would appreciate a frank and open discussion. As always, we are faced with both opportunities and risks in our markets, our competitive environments at home and abroad, and our logistical chains. And, financially, our costs are rising. The right people in the right places are increasingly expensive and our percent lost in moving products through the logistics chain is increasing. Tomorrow, we will look at the UAV picture. For now, though, lunch, and perhaps a refreshing siesta. We meet again at 1600, dinner at 2100. Please, do not stray beyond the concealment boundaries. The eyes are ever watching for our missteps.”

“We are all familiar with the old adage, ‘The pen is mightier than the sword,’” continued Don Quixote near the end of another delightful lunch with Amos Sanson. “Perhaps less familiar is Mister Frank Lloyd Wright’s quip, ‘I’m all in favor of keeping dangerous weapons out of the hands of fools. Let’s start with typewriters.’ My typewriting days ended long ago; however, I am fully aware that some of my early works are being used to advance points of view held by various factions in their attempts to prevent cooperation between the Americans and ourselves. I regret that my youthful fulminations, meant for other times and circumstances, should be brought up now; but, alas, words once rendered achieve a life of their own subject no longer to the control of the life that rendered them.

“I believe that I am not in mortal danger, but I understand the value of martyrdom and how easily it can be assigned. La apprendiza told me she asked someone she trusts to watch over me during these troubling times. Because I know she does not always entrust such duties to God alone, I think she may have entrusted the worldly functions to you. So I expect to trust you as I know she does.

“There are in our world a few whose powers of observation are advanced to extreme precision. They were probably trained to a fine pitch and then sent into places at times of great stress, when their observations were meant to advance or prevent significant events and consequences. Their experiences created in their minds a place where sights and sounds and smells were captured, perhaps to be revealed later, but never to be forgotten. Repetition and survival anchored these observations in their minds. For some, new sights and sounds and smells may resurrect them with uncontrollable effect ... post-traumatic stress syndrome, I think, is such an effect. For some, the observations are buried deeply or controlled effectively, and likely never will surface with disastrous impact though they may cause discomfort, perhaps extreme at times. For a few, however, the talents are honed to controlled perfection, are always tuned in to their environments, and are never turned off. For such as these, I offer a comforting paraphrase of one of your revolutionary fathers: ‘One’s net worth to the world is determined by what remains after bad deeds are subtracted from good ones.’

“My talents, such as they are, center on words and syntax, the organization and management of thoughts, recording and communicating as I learn. In many ways, I am the more passive counterpart of such worldly observers. Though I see and hear and smell some of the same things, I am not engaged in those more desperate moments. Books come easily to me; through them I perceive much of the world more through their authors’ deeds than through my own.

“At times, I feel that I am in the presence of one who has lived that way that I have not, yet has found in books and the passage of time a different perspective on life as he has lived it. From time to time, I wonder how he came to that perspective. A great American poet once wrote of roads taken and not taken. The world is a web of roads and paths, some more heavily travelled than others, some diverging while others are

converging, and some crossing in mysterious ways. Perhaps someday he will share his journey with me.

“Until then, I shall ride with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and joust with such wind mills as I chance upon, and share lunch and a bottle of light red wine of local vintage with friends old and new.”

A few days later, two secure satellite phones in the United States and one in Panama beeped quietly, all with the same message from Rosada Angel Jesus. Attached to the message was an article originating in the EPS London bureau reporting the destruction of a mud-brick hut in Southern Sudan by what was believed to be an explosion powerful enough to obliterate the interior of the hut while not collapsing its walls or throwing shrapnel-like debris through the neighborhood. According to children playing in the locality, a “toy plane” flew across the sky and into the open door of the hut just before they heard a sharp bang and saw clouds of dust puff out of the door and windows of the uninhabited structure. Appended to the article were three pages of text independently assessing the reliability of the source and the information, and correlating the information with the contents of other reports. The report was evaluated as B-2, emanating from a usually reliable source and probably true. Devon Zander immediately forwarded the message to Malcolm Garfield; Simon Stoddard saved the report to a file in an expanding drawer of UAV sightings in Africa. On the balcony of the Meridor Café in Casco Viejo, Amos Sanson reread the report. Occasionally, he paused to sip light red wine and watch the sun descend into the Pacific Ocean. Recalling the memorable words spoken by the world’s first consulting detective, he murmured half aloud: “The game is afoot.” Then, he forwarded the message to a secure computer in a flat overlooking the Bay of Biscay under a brief question, “What do you think?”

A few minutes after the message was read in Washington, Panama City, and somewhere north or south of the Rio Grande, Carlos Cassidea distributed copies of the EPS article to the council seated around the ornate table in the armored safe room deep beneath the hacienda in Sinaloa. It did not include the attachment prepared by Rosada Angel Jesus; but, the attachment was not necessary. Cassidea had his own sources for evaluating such



reports. In a remarkable display of parallel thinking, he concluded his report, “Caballeros, we have evaluated the report as almost certainly true. As our fictional nemesis might have said, ‘The game is afoot.’ We are ready to proceed with tests of our flight system in the Yucatan. These tests are of the flight system only. They will carry loads the size and weight of our improved IEDs, but no explosives or bomb-like objects. If you approve, a week from now you may expect a report on the results of these tests, and suggestions regarding testing the system in the American heartland.”

The Sinaloan glanced around the table, recording mentally the unanimous nods of assent. Turning to Cassidea, he said, “We will look forward to your report a week from today.”

Cassidea went on his way, closing the heavy door quietly behind him.

At a small café near Madrid’s Plaza Mayor, three old friends sat discussing current events and sharing a carafe of Sangria. Among the events was a growing technology being employed increasingly outside the United States while being hotly debated in the US by state and local authorities on privacy issues and studied by the federal government to resolve problems surrounding integration of the technology into the national airspace. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), unmanned aerial systems (UAS), and drones are among the acronyms and euphemisms bandied about in the corridors and war rooms above and below ground worldwide. The discussion, centered on the activities of a research and development facility near Bilbao, was led by an attractive Spanish woman in the company of two aging gentlemen in a discrete café just off the Calle de Atocha during the height of tourist season. The conversation was intense; both men attending carefully, one with a bit of the Irish in his voice when commenting or asking a question, the other saying nothing but nodding his head from time to time. Appearing to conclude her commentary, la senorita ended with a lighter tone:

“Without a doubt, the technology is having an impact worldwide outside Los Estados Unidos. The vehicles are perfectly suited to a number of legitimate aerial missions, including but not limited to aerial surveys, recreation and education. Within the US, experimental and recreational users regularly send vehicles aloft, and aerial surveys are being conducted within current air space restrictions. In northern Spain,

developers are testing new models, continuously improving payloads and reducing flight command and control vulnerabilities to hacking. You've seen the reports from Africa, so you know how the capabilities are progressing. The genii are out of the bottle, and will not be constrained. The powerful are not able to govern their instincts for doing what they want to do in any way possible; and, they are unable to constrain their impulses to extend their possibilities far beyond the limits of reason."

"Delivered with punctilious perfection, and a philosophical flourish, my dear," said one of the men in a rich Irish accent. Turning to their companion, he continued, "I concur in word, syntax, and philosophy. It is only a matter of 'when' the powerful with money to spare, scapegoats to sacrifice, and impulses beyond reason will turn loose their technology. The storm is on the horizon, and like the forces of nature, we can mitigate their impact or deal with their consequences. You might suggest that as a recommendation of sorts, though your countrymen are apt to blow up the baby when they throw out the bath water as they resolve their national issues.

"Changing tack, have you pursued any good books lately?"

They sat for a few minutes, conversing quietly as old friends do, then departing, two turning left to merge into a stream of tour groups led by harried docents as the third turned right to plunge deeper into a maze of narrow, twisting streets.

Within the hour, Rosada Angel Jesus forwarded the report of the conversation to Devon Xander somewhere north or south of the Rio Grande.

A week after receiving his orders, Senor Cassidea returned to the Sinaloan's hacienda to report his findings. He concluded his briefing with recommendations concerning the cartel's association with known terrorists:

"During our last meeting, I suggested that our organization shares many tactical methods with terrorist groups. But, while our targeting focuses upon rivals in our trade and authorities resisting our industry, terrorist targets are less discriminating and involve more damage to civilian infrastructure and people. In that way, their actions are not compatible with our objectives. For example, they are in the final stages of preparing for attacks upon a container vessel as it transits the Panama Canal and the press box and in-field fueling facilities at a NASCAR race in the southeast United States. These attacks

are intended to leverage media and government responses as much or more than to cause significant damage to the targets. They intend to strike a vessel carrying a volatile cargo while it is in the locks and perhaps delay significantly the passage of goods while the lock is closed to clear the wreckage and repair damage to the lock gates or chamber mechanisms. As for the NASCAR event, they simply hope to put the fear of God into the American authorities and public in general; something on the order of ‘You can’t protect yourselves.’

“We are prepared to launch attacks against two targets: a border patrol facility on an Interstate highway near El Paso in the United States, and the headquarters of our rivals on this side of the border in Juarez. We want to inflict material damage without loss of life on the US side, and we want to inflict maximum damage to the senior operational and tactical leadership of a northeastern Mexico rival. The extent of damage to the border patrol station will be minimal and easily repaired, but their vulnerability will be amplified in the responses of the media and in the halls of government. The damage to our Mexican rivals will be highly significant and will be followed with ground attacks aimed at destabilizing their command, control and operational capabilities in Mexico.

“And, we intend to do damage assessments for both our operations and those of the terrorist groups with which we are dealing. We want to know how good the products from our facilities in Spain are performing, and whether we can capitalize on our political alliances at home and abroad by contrasting our actions with terrorism. We want to demonstrate our strength, and our ability to limit operations to carefully controlled activities.

“We are observing closely the ‘experiments’ with recreational marijuana in the US states of Colorado and Washington, watching particularly for impacts on our shipments of marijuana into Los Estados Unidos. We still believe that, in the longer term, they will not be able to deal with the down-stream impacts. When their state and local governments get their hands on the money, they will want to grab all they can despite collateral effects.”

Cassidea sat comfortably at the right hand of the Sinaloan, responding expertly, and with a proper degree of humility, to an array of sophisticated business and operational questions. This, he thought, is a very able board of directors, fully capable of

dealing with the complexities of their modern industrial and political environments. If they are equally adept at managing across the nebulous boundary between legitimate and illegitimate enterprise we will do well and go far.

As if he had read Cassidea's thoughts, one of the Sinaloan's associates spoke up: "We have been experiencing difficulties with our air operations moving product through Latin America and into the United States. We may wish to look again at shipping by sea. Expansion of the canal has led to much speculation regarding impacts on US ports and container shipping by sea and rail across North America. There may be some confusion as they sort out their port and transshipment facilities. Reactivating our properties in Colon might let us to keep track, maybe join in, the planning for bigger ships and more pressure on port security operations. The hits on three of our people some time back may have cut into our activities in the free-trade zone, but authorities never did understand fully what was happening when our people were assassinated. We have sustained a modest flow of legitimate goods through the FTZ; maybe it's time to think about putting product back into that path."

Cassidea offered to assess the suggestion, and the Sinaloan nodded assent. With growing unrest among the cartels along the border and increasing police and military pressure from Mexico City and Washington, they were always looking for ways to maintain their shipments into the US and Europe, and the safe return of cash into their vaults and foreign accounts. Business was good, but never quite good enough to satisfy the masters of the supply-side.

Simon Stoddard, his eyes focusing on the computer screen before him, slowly lifted his secure satellite phone to his ear, listened for a moment, spoke only to say, "OK," and returned his full attention to the screen. Three hours later, travel documents in hand, he left for Dulles International Airport.

Sitting facing the setting sun barely a day later on the balcony of the Meridor, Amos Sanson concluded his report to Simon Stoddard:

"The situation points once again to a marriage between power and sophistication supported by resources that are a match for many nations. The money is mostly in the

hands of the cartels; the tactics and tradecraft lie mostly in the terror groups. But, the Four Countries training camp and the Bilboa R & D activities, along with the recruitment of special ops personnel, are rapidly transforming the cartels into formidable paramilitary organizations capable of directing small-scale operations across international borders. Devon is exposed to far more danger than either Rosada or me, so I plan to send this report to Rosada; she can get the information, and a warning, to him. I think it highly likely that he will share the information with Malcolm Garfield.

“Perhaps the most troublesome aspect of this will be escalation of the wars on drugs and terrorism as the cartels bring their UAVs on line. Terrorists will have access to some aerial potential that they haven’t had before, and lone-wolf terrorists can achieve a level of sophistication generally not available to them in the past. It is not a happy scenario.”

Simon sat silently for a moment; then he asked, “Just how certain are you about the timelines you’ve estimated?”

“It is their capabilities I have estimated, Simon, not their intentions. I’m observing what they can do, but I have no access to what they intend to do. That requires a level of analysis for which I have neither the resources nor the information. Malcolm may, but whether the people and data are organized to get the right information to the right people has always been a question where the governments are concerned. So, I’m confident in the estimates of their technical development, but I have no insight into their future operations.

“I think terrorists will use the UAVs first, and that some enterprising loner will squeeze off the first round. The technology is not beyond their capabilities, and they can get in close where the small scale can make considerable impact. My best guess is that the cartels may use them against each other, and maybe to target something like an isolated Border Patrol station or create an environmental problem. Both will want to stir up media response, confusion, political action and government overreaction.”

Simon replied, “I understand. I’ll take this up with Malcolm when I get back to DC. Also, I think it is time to take Marcello off the shelf, to dust-off his relationship with Lentz. She is still one of the top journalists dealing with international terrorism and drugs. I know for certain that he hasn’t been idle in either regard; his masters have got

over their pique and are putting his talents to work in the target-rich information markets in Washington and New York. Arianna has been active in the trans-Atlantic information trade, and she and Marcello have been seen at the same global trade conferences.”

“Be subtle, Simon,” interjected Amos. “In their separate roles, they have been helpful.”

“Don’t worry, Amos. I don’t want to burn those bridges. But, our purpose may be well served if we rekindle the fire in their relationship.”

At 0300 on Saturday morning, a mid-level cryptography supervisor was awakened from a sound sleep by a signal from his bedside secure phone. Sleepily, he listened to the excited voice of an intern from Texas A&M who had the weekend monitoring shift for a NSA telecommunications intercept station at Ft. Mead:

“I’ve got a link between the neighborhoods of the attacks on Daytona Speedway and the El Paso Border Patrol station.”

“What have you got, and this had better be good at three A.M. on Saturday.”

“The machine drew identical encrypts from two messages buried in the decrypt chain. They surface at different points in the algorithm, but they are identical.”

“So?”

“They also are identical to an archived item from the Four Countries training camp in Central America.”

Suddenly wide awake, the supervisor repeated, “So?”

“The training message decrypt has multiple groups, but a simple meaning. It means ‘OK,’ that’s all, just ‘OK.’ And get this, Boss, both messages originated within one minute of the hits on the Speedway and the station.”

“Did you follow up?”

“That’s affirmative, Boss. The French picked it up in Mali, and the African peace keepers recorded it in Sudan. And get this, Boss, we have the same message from a drug war battleground in Nuevo Laredo. It’s all buried at different levels in different chains, but I think it’s too many hits to be simple coincidence. I think it directly links terrorists and cartel battle groups to the training camp in Central America!”

“I hope you can sound as convincing when you brief the liaison group at the emergency meeting at 0700.”

“I didn’t know we had a meeting at 0700.”

“We don’t, but we will as soon as you get off the phone and start working-up the power point to show them at 0700. And, this time try to look professional, not like a bar-hopping graduate intern. This is center stage, young lady, and you are taking the leading role for a change.”

Quiet, followed by a voice sounding midway between unfettered excitement and total terror, “Me, Boss?”

“You. Get on it!”

The Boss disconnected, and immediately initiated the call for an emergency meeting at 0700. He hoped the information would be viewed by the liaison group with the same level of interest he had.

The power point presentation was routine and handled effectively by the intern who showed a degree of professionalism that surprised her supervisor. After a round of questions dealing more with the technical aspects of the intercept than the message itself, the intern moved to a chair along the wall. From there, she could respond to questions, if asked; otherwise she was to be no more than part of the woodwork.

FBI: “Not sound enough to provide evidence, and not linked directly to a perp.”

DIA: “Screw ‘evidence’. We’re not preparing for Federal Court.”

CIA: “Can we put together enough identifying information to warrant a closer look?”

DEA: “Is this a defensible indication of a direct link between drugs and terrorism?”

So went the discussion, round and round, until after an hour the liaison group decided to kick it up to Homeland Security’s DDI with a recommendation for further investigation. The data points were too few for much more than coincidence, statistically, but the group thought the weight of the issue warranted a deeper look. The intern and her supervisor were thanked for “a job well done,” and directed to look for

additional examples of use of the training code by drug, terrorist, and organized crime interests.

Back in his office, the Boss praised the intern and sent her off to spend the weekend searching an ocean of information for a drop of intelligence. But, she had youthful enthusiasm, the confidence of her boss, and ideas about searching the network for additional information. Boss went home to salvage something of his weekend.

Malcolm Garfield, DEA's representative on the working group, went back to his office and texted Devon Xander's secure line. "I think we're on to something. I'll meet you tomorrow in Nogales, usual place and time. If you can't make it then, let me know when, ASAP." Then he turned to his computer and began to look for possible links among cartels, terrorists, social action extremists, and training camps. He was convinced that the smoking gun lay close at hand, and he was determined to find it.

The Sinaloa and his chief of staff sat comfortably beneath the canopy that protected them from the prying eyes of the drones that seemed to be constantly on station over the estancia.

Cassidia was speaking: "We are like nations colliding when another cartel assails our boundaries or interferes with our operations, and when governments attack us. We might rather not go to war; but, when diplomacy avails us nothing, we have to fight. Our tactics may vary with our antagonist, so we must be prepared across the spectrum of conflict. Political, economic, military: We must be prepared to fit the tactic to the situation."

"You are unusually philosophical today, Carlos. What brings you to this state of mind?"

"So many things are happening throughout the world we live in. Network TV in Los Estados Unidos just presented a segment of a popular news program saying what we have been thinking about the use of drones north of our border. Heroin use in our major markets has increased as we thought it would. Pharmaceuticals for pain and liberalization of marijuana usage show great potential for growing our trade, and a report announced at the prestigious London School of Economics brands the war on drugs as a global disaster. Transportation problems hamper but do not prevent our movement of



product. And, our adversaries here and abroad cause us much grief. We are poised to deal with these issues, but if they could be mitigated we would be much more successful.

“We are like a nation state. We need to be proficient in our business practices and our diplomacy. We need to employ resources and maintain secure relationships with public officials, satisfy the appetites of our customers, and protect our interests against threats from both inside and outside our organization, that is to say both foreign and domestic. We need security systems for intelligence and paramilitary operations. We need ...”

“I understand what you are saying,” interjected the Sinaloan, “and I do not disagree, in principle. But, a state within a state, defense of a territory without mutually agreed borders, a bureaucracy; these and more, I think, are both inimical to our interests and beyond our capabilities. The great *Cosa Nostra* families in America have flourished at times, but the longevity of their leadership has been short. Much that you have described we do; you are absolutely correct in that. However, their functioning, as ours, is not legal; so while their influence is widely felt, they have not achieved ‘statehood’ within the state.

“Carlos, I value highly your thoughts, and I believe that you know all facets of our enterprise like no one does or is likely to. But, I think that we cannot afford the transparency that even the appearance of such an intelligent system would engender. The chaos and uncertainty that pervades our enterprise does us a great benefit by cloaking the brain within. Without uncertainty and chaos, the authorities would be able to define us and cripple us at critical points. If we fit their models, they will kill us all. We may possess the strength of Machiavelli’s philosophy; but, rich as we are, we cannot match the material resources of the Americans and the Europeans. If they ever get their acts together, be willing to abandon their polls and focus their resources on their vital interests, they will destroy us. The drones you notice around us would ignore the self-aggrandizing and sentimental debates and (gesturing broadly and softly exclaiming, ‘poof!’) vaporize us ... probably along with several hundreds or thousands of our innocent countrymen, and their handlers boisterously toasting their courage in the face of their ‘cowardly’ enemy.

“Please, Carlos, focus your intellect on our concrete needs.”

The Sinaloan rose from his chair and meandered toward the cool interior of his spacious home. He paused, looked back at Carlos and said, "From time to time, though, share with me the paths your immense intellect is wandering. You are among the very few of us with vision."

Simon Soddard stepped out of the billiard room onto the veranda of the stately old home in Virginia horse country, took from an inner pocket a Cuban cigar, lit it with a gold lighter, and noticed two men in the moonlight who appeared to be engaged in serious conversation. Quietly he watched. In a moment, one of the men looked his way, smiled, and motioned for him to approach. As he walked toward the two, he recognized the familiar face of Marcello Barcqe and said, "Ah, Marcello, it has been a while. Are you enjoying your time in our nation's capitol?"

"Indeed yes, Simon, please let me introduce to you my friend and colleague, a new addition to our embassy family. Simon Stoddard, this is Carlos Cassidea, a major asset in our economics section. It is likely that the two of you, from time to time, will be attending to the same business, so this more casual meeting is quite fortuitous."

"And what might that business be, Marcello?"

"I will be advising our chief negotiators in some very serious NAFTA discussions," said Carlos. "Marcello has told me to expect to see you in a similar role with the US team."

"Though not at the table, Senor Cassidea. Relegated to a chair against the wall if allowed in the room at all."

"No doubt within a whisper of the chief negotiator, if what I have heard about you is even remotely correct."

Marcello spoke as his companions appeared to study each other. "Carlos is a fellow countryman, and has spent much of his time abroad at the London School of Economics and observing the EU. Also, he is an engineer with a keen interest in developments likely in the wake of the expansion of the Panama Canal. He has been briefed on your mastery of international business affairs, Simon. I am pleased that you have met this evening in this most pleasant setting. Speaking of pleasant get-togethers, our host is motioning for us to return to the billiard room. Earlier, he mentioned that he

wanted to spend some time with each of the guests; I told him I would do what I could to assist. Shall we return?"

"Of course," replied Simon, turning to face Marcello. As they turned toward the door, he said, "Why don't the three of us get together for lunch soon?" Then turning to Carlos Cassidea, he added, "If, of course, we won't be violating the rules of the game."

"I rather imagine we will make up a rule or two as we go along, Simon," said Carlos as he smiled and shook Simon Stoddard's hand.

Marcello Barcqe put a hand on each man's shoulder and ushered them into the room. He was as pleased as Simon at the fortuitous event.

Malcolm Garfield could barely contain his excitement as he opened conversation with Devon Xander on a park bench in Nogales: "We've got the green light. DEA and CIA forwarded a joint recommendation to Homeland Security that has the full support of Mexican and US authorities, and Homeland got the go-ahead to send UAVs to axe the Sinaloan. We expect the hit to lead to all-out war of succession within his cartel and all along the Mexican side of the border. The best case scenario is to bring down the strongest, weaken the others as they battle for operational control in the vacuum created when the Sinaloan is eliminated, and cripple cross-border transshipments from Nogales to Laredo. This is big, Devon, and I want you in position to measure the impact all the way to Laredo."

"Slow down, Malcolm. You're talking about a lot of country," interjected Zander.

Garfield could not be contained. "This is the biggest operation ever mounted by the Mexicans and us, and we're going all-in. All the chips are on the table, and ..."

"Whoa, pard! Grab some air and let's talk about this."

"Nothing to talk about, my man. Everyone's onboard for once. We won't ever get a chance like this again. Whether we like it or not, it's go, go, go ... now or never. In or out?"

"In, Malcolm. You expect that or you wouldn't have mentioned it. But that's a lot of border for one man to cover. And I won't be able to work south of the border if the environment gets as wild as you say. The chaos might have covered me a while back, but

not now. Those folks have some very competent troops in the field now, and they'll be loaded and unlocked, and gunning for anything that looks the least bit suspicious. Someone will see me as 'suspicious' because I've been more visible to more people, Mexican and American, the last year or so. I can't cover it by myself. I'll need help. And the kind of help I'll need is the best available."

"Got'cha covered ..."

"Have you, now. I'm not talking about one of the boys on your usual payroll. No offense, Malcolm, but they won't last an hour in the plazas if this thing turns out the way you think. The cartels have some pretty savvy guys, and they know their territory and the usual suspects in it. They'll have hunter-killer teams who are a lot better than the soldiers who are shooting each other in the streets. Those teams will spot outsiders and shoot first rather than authenticate their targets. If you put your people out as observers, you better be prepared for casualties."

"OK, Devon. I get your point. What do you want?"

"I pick my team, you pick-up the tab, and we, just the two of us, do the communicating. I'm the only one who knows who is working for me. You trust me with a blank check, Malcolm; no receipts, no details, no questions. Dip into some of the cash you've confiscated in your busts."

"I'm good with that; but the bean counters are going to crawl all over me."

"Looks like a good time for the good politics to exercise some pest control."

Laughing, Malcolm Garfield replied, "Give me a couple of days to set it up. If I can't, you're out of it; but, I think I can. I'll give you a simple go or no go day after tomorrow through Rosada. OK?"

"OK."

"Get out of here while I finish my lunch." After a short pause, Malcolm Garfield continued thoughtfully, "This is the best thing we've had going for a long time, maybe ever, Devon. Message in two days."

Devon Zander walked away without a backward glance, thoughts merging. "I hope you and the Washington wonks know what you're getting us into, Malcolm. All hell is going to break loose, whether we win or lose. Heads are going to roll, whether we win or lose. The press will have a field day, whether we win or lose. Then again,

nothing ventured, nothing gained.” He walked on, fingering his secure phone, trying to decide whether to call Simon or Amos first. Zander sighed and dialed Amos Sanson’s number.