

Endangering the Minutemen

Credible reports indicate that the U.S. government is spying on border volunteers such as the Minutemen, and passing the intelligence on to the Mexican government.

by Thomas R. Eddlem

“While Minuteman civilian patrols are keeping an eye out for illegal border crossers,” reported the Ontario, California-based *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*, “the U.S. Border Patrol is keeping an eye out for Minutemen — and telling the Mexican government where they are.” News of the charge that the Mexican government was receiving intelligence from bureaucrats at the U.S. Border Patrol on Minutemen and other volunteer groups spread across the nation like wildfire.

Congressman Tom Tancredo (R-Colo.) suggested that the cooperation between the U.S. and Mexican governments, along with the publication of a Mexican government report on “vigilantes,” could have been designed to intimidate Minutemen. “Heavily-armed military officials sta-

tioned only yards from civilians are at least intimidating,” states Tancredo. “I can only surmise that the Border Patrol bureaucrats’ spying is meant to have a chilling effect on the Minutemen’s recruitment of more volunteers.” Of course, a congressional investigation earlier this year revealed that the Mexican government is flexing its military power on the border, often against even Border Patrol agents. Border Patrol Union Local 2544 in Tucson, Arizona, the largest group of Border Patrol agents in the country, states on its website that:

President Bush is doing back flips to assure the hypocritical El Presidente Fox that America will not “militarize” the border... Fox has already “militarized” the border. Mexico has plenty of troops on the border. We know this because we see them all the time and they shoot at us with rather large .50

caliber rifles. All we can do is hope their aim is bad, run from them, and then watch as the cowards from our government hide from the issue, and their government lies about them even being there.

The bottom line, Minuteman spokesperson Connie Hair told *THE NEW AMERICAN*, is that “our lives were unduly placed in danger.” Hair added that the Minutemen are “exploring legal action.”

Laying on the Whitewash

The U.S. Border Patrol quickly shifted into damage control, issuing a vague denial: “Border Patrol does not report activity by civilian, non-law enforcement groups to the Government of Mexico,” Border Patrol spokesman Mario Martinez stated in a May 9 press release on the issue.

Volunteer activists are skeptical of the Border Patrol denial — a generic statement that did not deal with the specific allegations — for good reason. “Nobody but law enforcement and Border Patrol knew where we were at,” Andy Ramirez of the Chino, California-based Friends of the Border Patrol told the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*. “So how is our base address on a Mexican government document dated last

What is beyond dispute is the fact that the Mexican government's embassies have been keeping tabs on American volunteers, and that they have lobbied border officials to give intelligence to the Mexican government on the whereabouts and activities of groups like the Minutemen.

August? Nobody, not even the media, had this information."

Also casting doubt on the Border Patrol's denial are official Mexican government publications which assert a close relationship with the Border Patrol and reveal detailed information on the operations of the Minutemen and similar groups. The Mexican government's three-part *Report on the Activities of Vigilantes* included numerous details about operational deployments, such as: "The watchmen who were looking throughout the border strip, to the east of the port of entrance of Naco, moved three miles to the east of Naco in the direction of Douglas [Arizona]. According to the consular reports, they appeared to number around 40 individuals, making use of binoculars, who were trying to find undocumented migrants."

The Mexican government's third *Report on the Activities of Vigilantes* noted that the Mexican embassy had met with local San Diego area Border Patrol Chief Darryl Griffen, stressing, "Mr. Griffen reiterated to the undersecretary his promise to notify the General Consul right away when the vigilantes detain or participate in the detention of any undocumented migrant."

Still in whitewash mode, the Border Patrol trotted out Griffen in front of the media to issue another denial. "The article that appeared is not accurate, and we have requested a retraction," Griffen told Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly, echoing the words of the Bor-

der Patrol press release. "It is not the policy of the Border Patrol to provide information to the government of Mexico with regards to the specific locations of civilian patrol group operations." Why Griffen took issue with "the article" in the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin* and not the publication of the Mexican government is curious. And how the Mexican

government got the strong impression that Griffen would inform them about Minutemen activities remains a mystery.

The *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin's* report was also supported by statements from former Border Patrol agents, who reported unprofessional cooperation between the Border Patrol and the Mexican government.

"Scott James, a former Tucson agent, resigned after eight years of service in February, citing a lack of support for agents by the Department of Homeland Security," reported the newspaper. "He said that U.S. Border Patrol officials provided office

space inside their headquarters to Mexican consulate officials, allowed the consulate to dictate the agents' activities, and gave the consulate information on ongoing investigations."

Several congressmen have already called for an investigation of the allegations. Congressman Jack Kingston (R-Ga.) and three other congressmen noted in a letter to U.S. Customs and Border Commissioner Deborah Spero condemning the weak Border Patrol denial that "this press release falls short of clarifying this situation fully which could put American lives at risk." Congressmen Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), who has called for a congressional investigation along with Kingston, stressed: "Providing Mexico with information that can help smugglers and illegal border crossers evade capture is absurd." Minuteman spokesperson Connie Hair told THE NEW AMERICAN that congressional inquiries have gotten nowhere thus far. "All of these folks have written to the Border Patrol and are getting stonewalled."

What is beyond dispute is the fact that the Mexican government's embassies have been keeping tabs on American volunteers,



Clearly defined Mexican intentions: A member of Grupo Beta, an organization sponsored by the Mexican government to aid Hispanics intent on crossing into the United States, is shown here (front left, in hat) at the U.S. border.

and that they have lobbied border officials to give intelligence to the Mexican government on the whereabouts and activities of groups like the Minutemen.

The *Report on the Activities of Vigilantes* stressed that "the Secretary of Foreign Relations instructed Mexican consulates in the United States ... [to] stay alert, fortify communication channels with state and local authorities, and so monitor activities of 'vigilante' groups, whether or not they are tied to the Minuteman group, which could violate the rights of our countrymen."

Thus, the reports note that the Mexican embassy in Washington spied on Minuteman activists during 2005: "The personnel in the consulate in Douglas [Arizona] maintained constant communication with the liaisons and supervisors of the stations of the Border Patrol of Naco and Douglas, as well as with bailiffs of the office of Sheriff of Cochise County and the police of Naco and Douglas."

More Mexican Meddling

The Mexican government report also acknowledges an effort by the Mexican government to partner with political enemies of the Minutemen, noting a meeting on June 6, 2005 between Mexican embassy officials and groups such as the California-based Legal Assistance Foundation and the National Institute of Migration. In another section of the report, the Mexican government acknowledges contacts with the American Civil Liberties Union and signing an agreement with the U.S.-based Center for Human and Constitutional Rights in the United States to coordinate legal action against the Minutemen.

Minuteman spokesperson Connie Hair told THE NEW AMERICAN that they know border agents who are willing to testify to the corruption of the Border Patrol as long as they are protected from political persecution: "Potential whistle-blowers are willing to come forward as long as they feel protected." A thorough congressional investigation of the charges is desperately needed. And a genuine investigation is likely to bring out more details of the inordinate influence the Mexican government wields on the U.S. Border Patrol, and to illuminate alarming efforts by the Mexican government to influence the American political process. ■



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