

CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

Border Security: Key Agencies and Their Missions

Blas Nuñez-Neto
Analyst in Social Legislation
Domestic Social Policy Division

Summary

After the massive reorganization of federal agencies precipitated by the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), there are now four main federal agencies charged with securing the United States' borders: the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP), which patrols the border and conducts immigrations, customs, and agricultural inspections at ports of entry; the Bureau of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which investigates immigrations and customs violations in the interior of the country; the United States Coast Guard, which provides maritime and port security; and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which is responsible for securing the nation's land, rail, and air transportation networks.

This report is meant to serve as a primer on the key federal agencies charged with border security; as such it will briefly describe each agency's role in securing our nation's borders. This report will be updated as needed.

In the wake of the tragedy of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Congress decided that enhancing the security of the United States' borders was a vitally important component of preventing future terrorist attacks. Before September 11, 2001, border security fell piecemeal under the mandate of many diverse federal departments, including but not limited to: the Department of Justice (the Immigration and Naturalization Service); the Department of the Treasury (the Customs Service); the Department of Agriculture (the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service); and the Department of Transportation (the Coast Guard).

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-296) consolidated most federal agencies operating along the U.S. borders within the newly formed DHS. Most of these agencies are now located in the Directorate of Border and Transportation Security (BTS), which was charged with securing the borders; territorial waters; terminals; waterways; and air, land, and sea transportation systems of the United States; and managing the nation's

ports of entries.¹ The lone exception is the U.S. Coast Guard, which remains a standalone division within DHS.

The BTS comprises three main agencies: (1) the CBP, which is charged with overseeing commercial operations, inspections, and land border patrol functions, (2) ICE, which oversees investigations, alien detentions and removals, air/marine drug interdiction operations, and federal protective services, and (3) the TSA, which is charged with protecting the nation's air, land, and rail transportation systems against all forms of attack to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce. Conceptually speaking, CBP provides the front line responders² to immigrations and customs violations and serves as the law enforcement arm of DHS, while ICE serves as the investigative branch. Although it is not located within the BTS, the U.S. Coast Guard also serves an important border security function by patrolling the nation's territorial and adjacent international waters against foreign threats. Combined FY2004 appropriations for BTS and the Coast Guard equaled \$17.91 billion,³ while the combined full time equivalent (FTE) manpower totaled 142,255 employees.⁴

The Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP)

CBP combined all the previous border law enforcement agencies under one administrative umbrella. This involved absorbing employees from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the Border Patrol, the Customs Service, and the Department of Agriculture. CBP's mission is to prevent terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering the country, provide security at U.S. borders and ports of entry, apprehend illegal immigrants, stem the flow of illegal drugs, and protect American agricultural and economic interests from harmful pests and diseases.⁵ As it performs its official missions, CBP maintains two overarching and sometimes conflicting goals: increasing security while facilitating legitimate trade and travel.⁶ In FY2004, CBP appropriations totaled \$4.90 billion⁷ and manpower totaled 30,836 FTE.

¹ For a more detailed information on DHS, see CRS Report RL31549, *Department of Homeland Security: Consolidation of Border and Transportation Security Agencies*, by Jennifer Lake.

² Many argue that the State Department's Consular posts abroad provide the first line of defense by reviewing visa applications and determining which foreign nationals will be provided with the documentation required to legally enter the country.

³ For a more detailed breakdown of DHS appropriations, see CRS Report RL32302, *Appropriations for FY2005: Department of Homeland Security*, by Jennifer Lake.

⁴ All manpower estimates taken from The Department of Homeland Security, Performance Budget Overview, *Fiscal Year 2005 Congressional Budget Justification*.

⁵ U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, *Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Bill, 2005*, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., H.Rept. 108-541.

⁶ U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Performance and Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2003*, p. 25.

⁷ While CBP administers the US-VISIT program, the \$328 million appropriated for the program was placed in a separate account directly under the Undersecretary for Border and Transportation Security by the conference report.

Between official ports of entry, the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) enforces U.S. immigration law and other federal laws along the border. As currently comprised, the USBP is the uniformed law enforcement arm of the Department of Homeland security. Its primary mission is to detect and prevent the entry of terrorists, weapons of mass destruction, and unauthorized aliens into the country, and to interdict drug smugglers and other criminals. The USBP is thus vitally important to our nation's defense against terrorists and all others attempting to enter goods or persons into the country illegally. In the course of discharging its duties the USBP patrols over 8000 miles of our international borders with Mexico and Canada and the coastal waters around Florida and Puerto Rico.

At official ports of entry, CBP officers are responsible for conducting immigrations, customs, and agricultural inspections on entering aliens. As a result of the new "one face at the border" initiative, CBP inspectors are being cross-trained to perform all three types of inspections in order to streamline the border crossing process. This initiative unifies the prior inspections processes, providing entering aliens with one primary inspector who is trained to determine whether a more detailed secondary inspection is required.⁸

CPB inspectors enforce immigration law by examining and verifying the travel documents of incoming international travelers to ensure they have a legal right to enter the country. On the customs side, CBP inspectors ensure that all imports and exports comply with U.S. laws and regulations, collect and protect U.S. revenues, and guard against the smuggling of contraband. Additionally, CBP is responsible for conducting agricultural inspections at ports of entry in order to enforce a wide array of animal and plant protection laws. In order to carry out these varied functions, CBP inspectors have a broad range of powers to inspect all persons, vehicles, conveyances, merchandise, and baggage entering the United States from a foreign country.⁹

In order to execute its various missions, CBP maintains and utilizes several databases. CBP also administers the new US-VISIT program, which requires all incoming non-immigrant aliens to submit to a biometric scan.¹⁰ Additionally, CBP administers the Container Security Initiative, a program in which CBP inspectors pre-screen U.S.-bound marine containers at foreign ports of loading around the world.

Bureau of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

ICE merged the investigative functions of the former INS and the Customs Service, the INS detention and removal functions, most INS intelligence operations, the Federal Protective Service, and the Federal Air Marshals Service. This makes ICE the principal investigative arm for DHS. ICE's mission is to detect and prevent terrorist and criminal acts by targeting the people, money, and materials that support terrorist and criminal

⁸ Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Press Secretary, "Homeland Security Announces New Initiatives," press release, Sept. 2, 2003.

⁹ For a more detailed analysis of inspections practices along the U.S. border, including the legislative foundation for CBP powers, a history of inspections practices, and the policy issues involved, refer to CRS Report RL32399, *Border Security: Inspections Practices, Policies, and Issues*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem.

¹⁰ For further discussion and analysis of the US-VISIT program, see CRS Report RL32234, *U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology Program (US-VISIT)*, by Lisa Seghetti.

networks.¹¹ As such they are an important component of our nation's border security network even though their main focus is on interior enforcement. In FY2004, ICE appropriations totaled \$3.43 billion and the agency had 14,410 FTE employees.

Unlike CBP, whose jurisdiction is confined to law enforcement activities along the border, ICE special agents investigate immigrations and customs violations in the interior of the United States. ICE's mandate includes uncovering national security threats such as weapons of mass destruction or potential terrorists, identifying criminal aliens for removal, probing immigration-related document and benefit fraud, investigating work-site immigration violations, exposing alien and contraband smuggling operations, interdicting narcotics shipments,¹² and detaining illegal immigrants and ensuring their departure (or removal) from the United States.¹³

ICE is also responsible for the collection, analysis and dissemination of strategic and tactical intelligence data pertaining to homeland security, infrastructure protection, and the illegal movement of people, money, and cargo within the U.S.¹⁴ In December 2003, the Federal Air Marshal Service (FAMS) was transferred from the TSA to ICE. FAMS is responsible for detecting, deterring and defeating hostile acts targeting U.S. air carriers, airports, passengers and crews by placing undercover armed agents in airports and on flights. Lastly, ICE polices and secures more than 8,800 federal facilities nationwide via the Federal Protective Service.¹⁵

The United States Coast Guard

The Coast Guard was incorporated into DHS as a standalone agency in 2002. Their overall mission is to protect the public, the environment, and U.S. economic interests in maritime regions — at the nation's ports and waterways, along the coast, and in international waters.¹⁶ The Coast Guard is thus the nation's principal maritime law enforcement authority and the lead federal agency for the maritime component of homeland security, including port security. Among other things, the Coast Guard is responsible for: evaluating, boarding, and inspecting commercial ships as they approach U.S. waters; countering terrorist threats in U.S. ports; and for helping to protect U.S. Navy ships in U.S. ports. A high-ranking Coast Guard officer in each port area serves as the Captain of the Port and is the lead federal official responsible for the security and safety

¹¹ Bureau of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Fact Sheet, at [http://www.ice.gov/graphics/news/factsheets/061704det_FS.htm].

¹² Bureau of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, Office of Investigations Fact Sheet, [http://www.ice.gov/graphics/news/factsheets/investigation_FS.htm].

¹³ Bureau of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Organization, at [<http://www.ice.gov/graphics/about/organization/index.htm>].

¹⁴ Bureau of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, Office of Intelligence Organization, at [http://www.ice.gov/graphics/about/organization/org_intell.htm].

¹⁵ Bureau of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, Organization, at [<http://www.ice.gov/graphics/about/organization/index.htm>].

¹⁶ U.S. Coast Guard, Overview at [<http://www.uscg.mil/overview/>].

of the vessels and waterways in their geographic zone.¹⁷ In FY2004, Coast Guard appropriations totaled \$6.78 billion and the agency had 45,532 FTE military and civilian employees.

As part of Operation Noble Eagle (military operations in homeland defense and civil support to U.S. federal, state and local agencies), the Coast Guard is at a heightened state of alert protecting more than 361 ports and 95,000 miles of coastline. The Coast Guard's homeland security role includes protecting ports, the flow of commerce, and the marine transportation system from terrorism; maintaining maritime border security against illegal drugs, illegal aliens, firearms, and weapons of mass destruction; ensuring that the U.S. can rapidly deploy and resupply military assets by maintaining the Coast Guard at a high state of readiness as well as by keeping marine transportation open for the other military services; protecting against illegal fishing and indiscriminate destruction of living marine resources; preventing and responding to oil and hazardous material spills; and coordinating efforts and intelligence with federal, state, and local agencies.¹⁸

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA)

The TSA was created as a direct result of the events of September 11 and is charged with protecting the United States' air, land, and rail transportation systems to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce. The Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA, P.L. 107-71) created the TSA and included provisions that established a federal baggage screener workforce, required checked baggage to be screened by explosive detection systems, and significantly expanded FAMS. In 2002, TSA was transferred to the newly formed DHS from the Department of Transportation; as previously noted, in 2003 the Federal Air Marshal program was taken out of TSA and transferred to ICE. In FY2004, TSA appropriations totaled \$2.52 billion and the agency had 51,346 FTE employees.

TSA is responsible for guaranteeing the security of aviation in the country. In order to achieve this mission TSA assumed responsibility for screening air passengers and baggage, a function that had previously resided with the air carriers. TSA is also charged with ensuring the security of air cargo and overseeing security measures at airports to limit access to restricted areas, secure airport perimeters, and conduct background checks for airport personnel with access to secure areas, among other things.¹⁹ However, an opt out provision in ATSA will permit every airport with federal screeners to request a switch to private screeners commencing in November 2004.²⁰

¹⁷ For an in depth discussion of the Coast Guard and port security, see CRS Report RS21125, *Homeland Security: Coast Guard Operations — Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke, and CRS Report RL31733, *Port and Maritime Security: Background and Issues for Congress*, by John Frittelli.

¹⁸ U.S. Coast Guard, Homeland Security Factcard, at [<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-cp/comrel/factfile/Factcards/Homeland.htm>].

¹⁹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Aviation Security: Efforts to Measure Effectiveness and Address Challenges*, GAO-04-232T, Nov. 5, 2003, pp. 5-6.

²⁰ See CRS Report RL32383, *A Return to Private Security at Airports?: Background and Issues* (continued...)

ATSA authorized the TSA to create a Computer-Assisted Passenger Prescreening System (CAPPS II), a program that would compare the basic personal information provided by airline passengers to varied commercial databases in order to confirm their identity. However, due to mounting privacy concerns and operational problems, TSA recently announced it is scrapping its plans to implement CAPPSII this fall and will design a new program in its stead.²¹

Conclusion

This report has briefly outlined the roles and responsibilities of the four main agencies within the DHS charged with securing our nation's borders: the CBP, ICE, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the TSA. It should be noted, however, that while the Homeland Security Act of 2002 consolidated all the agencies with primary border security roles in DHS, there are many other federal agencies involved in the difficult task of securing our nation's borders. While border security may not be in their central mission, they nevertheless provide important border security functions. These agencies include, but are not limited to the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigrations Services within DHS, which processes permanent residency and citizenship applications, as well as asylum and refugee processing; the Department of State, which is responsible for visa issuances overseas; the Department of Agriculture, which establishes the agricultural policies that CBP Inspectors execute; the Department of Justice, whose law enforcement branches (the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)) coordinate with CBP and ICE agents when their investigations involve border or customs violations; the Department of Health and Human Services, through the Food and Drug Administration and the Center for Disease Control; the Department of Transportation, whose Federal Aviation Administration monitors all airplanes entering American air space from abroad; and lastly the Central Intelligence Agency, which is an important player in the efforts to keep terrorists and other foreign agents from entering the country. Additionally, due to their location, state and local responders from jurisdictions along the Canadian and Mexican borders also play a significant role in the efforts to secure our nation's borders.

²⁰ (...continued)

Regarding the Opt-Out Provision of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act, by Bartholomew Elias.

²¹ Chris Strohm, "DHS Scraps Computer Pre-Screening System, Starts Over," *Government Executive Online*, July 15, 2004, at [<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0704/071504c1.htm>].