

INS head outlines Border Patrol strategy

The June 7 article concerning the Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) Border Patrol operations, hiring and recruiting is inaccurate and incomplete ("Border Patrol too small to do job," Special Report).

Contrary to what the article describes, INS has achieved considerable success in restoring integrity and safety to the southwest border. INS is implementing a comprehensive border-management strategy, developed in 1994, that targets areas of major illegal-alien traffic on the southwest border.

Simply stated, the strategy is to regain control of the border by progressively focusing new resources on those areas where most of the illegal crossings occur. Apprehensions are at an all-time low in areas where we have deployed resources and are gaining control of the border.

The number of Border Patrol agents assigned to the southwest border has increased by 140 percent in the past five years, climbing from 3,389 in fiscal year 1993 to 8,130 as of May 22, 1999. Force-multiplying equipment, state-of-the-art technology and infrastructure improvements have backed these new agents.

Flexibility is fundamental to the

strategy. INS shifts resources, staff and tactics to fit the changing situations along the border. Key examples of this are INS' worldwide safety initiative to prevent migrant deaths and the recent detail of agents to Douglas, Ariz., to address increased illegal traffic.

INS' work and resources on the southwest border tend to get more attention, but we are just as committed to strengthening management of the northern border. In fiscal year 1999, the northern border received 22 new agents and a significant portion of our force-multiplying technology.

In addition, two new camera systems are planned for installation on the northern border. Known as the Integrated Surveillance Intelligence System, it provides video to monitor the border, identify the source of ground sensor activations, detect illegal activities and dispatch agents as needed.

The success of our strategy ultimately depends on having trained agents in the field. Meeting the Border Patrol's hiring objective is one of the attorney general's highest priorities. INS has met or exceeded its hiring goals for the past four years.

The Border Patrol in recent years has attracted some of our nation's best and brightest to a job that is

extremely demanding. We are deeply committed to fulfilling the agency's recruitment needs, but we will not sacrifice quality. INS maintains recruiting and training standards that are the highest in federal law enforcement.

This year, INS has vigorously intensified its recruiting efforts, visiting twice as many military bases and three times as many colleges in fiscal year 1999 as in fiscal year 1998. We are also participating in about 200 job fairs, community festivals and other events. We also created a new 800 telephone number with information on frequently asked questions about Border Patrol agent positions and the application process; the phone line is averaging 2,000 calls per week.

INS also has committed up to 200 Border Patrol agents for local outreach and recruitment activities. We continue to work with Congress on Border Patrol pay and grade issues. Though the agency is facing recruiting and hiring challenges, it is addressing these challenges head-on to ensure the continued success of INS' Border Patrol operations.

DORIS MEISSNER

Commissioner

U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service
Washington

An unfair depiction of the military brat on the culture page

I am deeply disturbed by the comments of Bill Kauffman regarding military dependents ("Brick in the wall," Culture, et cetera, June 24). I raised two military brats and do not agree with him. To blame the lifestyle of the military brat on what happened at Columbine High School is stupid.

My experiences have shown that military children can get along with anyone who treats them as an equal.

They are well-versed in abiding not only by the law of the land, but also by military law. They are taught to present themselves in a highly favorable manner when they travel around the world. They are taught to represent the United States as an ambassador would. It is true that they honor God and country. These are not bad traits.

I know Mr. Kauffman is searching for a reason for what happened

at Columbine High School, but I strongly would urge him to lay off the military brat. I feel that he spoke before thinking. He obviously has no idea what military children are like. I am proud of the military brat.

SGT. 1ST CLASS LUTHER A. SMITH

U.S. Army (Retired)

Hattiesburg, Miss.

Don't give in to the temptation of racial profiling

Congratulations to The Washington Times for revealing that Bill Clinton, while governor of Arkansas, approved and defended the practice of "profiling" aimed at Hispanics — a practice he now calls "morally indefensible" ("Criminal profiling," Editorials, June 27).

Racial and ethnic profiling is not irrational, but it is bad policy and bad law. The edge it gives police in making an arrest is not worth sacrificing the community's trust and the principle of nondiscrimination. The government should not make gross generalizations about people based on

their skin color or where their ancestors came from — even if it is easy or efficient to do so. Individuals are entitled to be judged as individuals, rather than on stereotypes.

It is ironic that people such as Mr. Clinton and his supporters in the civil-rights establishment denounce this sort of stereotyping in the context of racial profiling but adamantly defend it in when it comes to hiring and promoting police officers, admitting students to college and awarding government contracts. They can't have it both ways.

Because a disproportionate

amount of crime is committed by blacks, it is tempting for both liberals and conservatives to conclude that criminal-justice policy ought to include a racial component. But this temptation to view the crime problem through a racial lens must be resisted. Racist police aren't the problem, on the one hand, nor is there any shortage of law-abiding blacks and criminal whites, on the other.

ROGER CLEGG

General counsel

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An obscure addition to the National Register of Historic Places

It is said that truth is stranger than fiction. That was brought home in spades in two June 24 articles in The Washington Times about homosexual activities.

In the first, "Gay group takes aim at movement," I somewhat reveled in reading that a gay and lesbian group, Equal Partners in Faith, intended to protest Promise Keepers rallies this summer because Promise Keepers are "devoted to mores and values of 19th century America." I reveled in this news because, in my book, those values of honesty, patriotism, faith, civic responsibility and family are not so bad. For anyone attacking those values, the question should be, why?

My reverie soon was dashed

when I turned the page and read that none other than our values-impaired Clinton administration had awarded a place on the National Register of Historic Places to New York's Stonewall Inn, where homosexuals banded together to attack police officers and riot for four days in June 1969. What's next? Reward Attica prison inmates for their rioting? How about rewarding the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles for its riots?

Until today, had you asked me what the Stonewall Inn was, I would have guessed that it had something to do with the Civil War, even though in 1969 I was living less than 30 miles away from the Greenwich Village site. So now, how do we explain

to our children this obscure counterculture haven's designation on the National Register of Historic Places? How do we place the Stonewall Inn alongside the likes of Mount Vernon, Ford's Theatre, Independence Hall, Fort McHenry and the Alamo?

Worse yet, how do parents tell their children that the take-away lesson of the Clinton administration is that the "great and enlightened" homosexual movement denigrates traditional values while embracing lawlessness and hedonism and therefore must be rewarded? How tragically comical. God help us.

M.C. AGRESTI

Arlington

Border Patrol Adds High-Tech Tools to Its Arsenal

Surveillance Scopes, Sensors Join Force's War on Smuggling

WILLIAM BRANTON
Washington Post Staff Writer

BROWNSVILLE, Tex.—Sitting in front of a small screen in a cramped metal box 20 feet above the ground, senior Border Patrol agent Rey Abrego watches a human form moving through riverbank brush on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. It is pitch dark outside, but the form shows up as a bright light against the green glow of the monitor, which is connected to a Loris infrared night-vision scope overlooking the river.

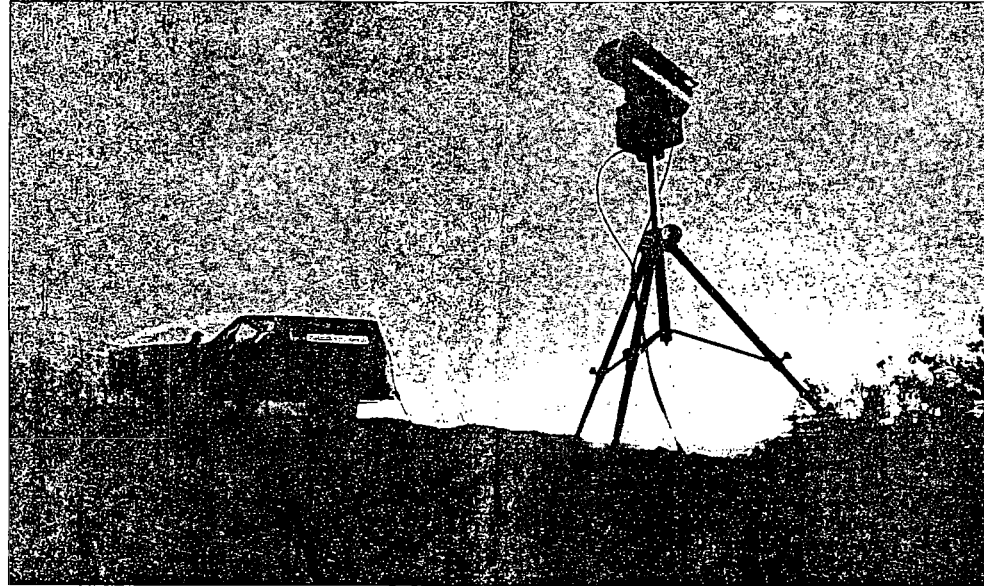
Hours later, the shape on the screen crosses the river into Texas and runs into Border Patrol agents who have been directed to the scene by radio from Abrego's olive-green "Skywatch" box. They arrest a young Mexican man and find 16 pounds of marijuana in his backpack.

After years of waging a losing battle to control the 2,000-mile line between the United States and Mexico, the Border Patrol increasingly is throwing high technology into its fight against illegal immigration and drug trafficking.

The high-tech equipment, much of it originally developed for military use, has not yet turned the tide. People and drugs still flow across the border in large volumes, as does all sorts of contraband from fruit to avocados. But Border Patrol agents say the gadgetry, combined with a major increase in manpower, is helping to make the formerly neglected agency more efficient in its task of guarding the nation's borders.

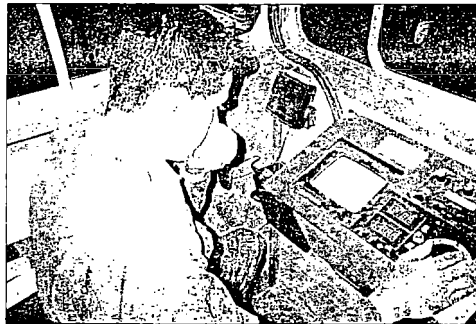
The Border Patrol has more than doubled in size from 1993 to last year, reaching nearly 8,000 agents. A thousand more are scheduled to be added this year. Yet their ranks continue to be stretched thin, considering that they must cover more than 6,000 miles of land border in the continental United States alone.

Accompanying the personnel buildup has been an infusion of new high-tech gear, including



BY WILLIAM BRANTON—THE WASHINGTON POST

Border Patrol agent Rey Abrego, left, watches for illegal immigrants from a "Skywatch" box equipped with an infrared night-vision scope along the Rio Grande near Brownsville, Tex. The agency is increasing its use of high-tech gadgets such as the "Scope Truck" above in an effort to increase efficiency in the battle to prevent illegal aliens and drugs from crossing the U.S. border.



BY WILLIAM BRANTON—THE WASHINGTON POST

night-vision scopes, ground sensors, low-light TV cameras, computerized identification systems and license-plate scanners. In addition, the Border Patrol has acquired new vehicles, river patrol boats and even helicopters.

The agency now has 185 infrared heat-detecting scopes deployed along the southwestern border, a five-fold increase from four years ago. More than 8,600 seismic sensors are buried near border crossing points to detect movements by illegal immigrants, nearly double the number in 1994.

In its latest budget request, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Border Patrol's parent agency, is seeking \$50 million for additional technology, including 176 low-light "remote video surveillance" cameras to be positioned along the border.

The high-tech equipment serves as "force multipliers," increasing agents' productivity, according to a Border Patrol report. "The use of technological resources such as

low-light TV, infrared night scopes, sensors and encrypted radios has moved the Border Patrol into the 21st century of law enforcement."

Even so, agents still often resort to 19th-century methods reminiscent of the Old West as they pursue

their quarry along riverbanks and through ranch lands adjoining the border. The Border Patrol still uses agents designated as "sign cutters" to examine footprints and other evidence of passage to help track down illegal aliens and smugglers.

A key technological advance in

this area is the Skywatch, a mobile observation post that can be towed behind a Border Patrol vehicle and set up to keep an eye on crossing points. A hydraulic lift elevates a box containing a monitor and communications gear, with windows on all sides. Mounted on the roof of the metal box is a heat-detecting night scope with a range of more than a mile. The operator can use it to pan across the landscape or zoom in on suspicious objects.

A quiet-running generator pow-

ers the equipment, which includes air-conditioning for the hot summers here and powerful outside lights that can be turned on to illuminate illegal crossers or deter them from trying.

The Border Patrol's McAllen sector, which covers 280 miles of border and includes Brownsville, now has about 40 Skywatches and relies heavily on them to detect illegal crossers at night, said Jose E. Garza, sector chief.

"The night-vision equipment has made a tremendous impact," Garza said. "It allows our folks to take the night away from the aliens and the smugglers. It helps us do a much better job than we could in the past."

The devices have helped the sector lead the southwestern border in narcotics seizures, he said. Last year, agents in the sector seized 132 tons of marijuana and more than three tons of cocaine worth a total of \$408 million. So far this fiscal year, they have captured 59 tons of marijuana and a ton and a half of cocaine with a combined value of \$193 million.

Other infrared scopes used by the Border Patrol elevate from the back of four-wheel-drive vehicles and produce images on a screen beside the driver. Some agents also carry night-vision goggles that work like binoculars and radio scanners to detect transmissions among alien-smugglers or drug runners.

"We've had great success with the scanners," said John Gunnoe, a supervisory Border Patrol agent in Brownsville. Agents have used them to pick up radio traffic from lookouts who are sent by drug traffickers to scout official crossing points. The lookouts are sometimes heard speaking to comrades in a crude code, using such nicknames as "el roñoso" (the mangy one) for a drug-sniffing dog.

One source of frustration for the Border Patrol is a ban on its equipment in riverside sanctuaries run by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"They've also become sanctuaries for illegal aliens," said Garza. "We don't want to interfere with the habitat of nocturnal animals. But the aliens and the smugglers don't care."

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CRS Report for Congress

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U.S. Border Patrol Operations

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Summary

In FY1995, the U.S. Border Patrol formally adopted a strategy known as "prevention through deterrence." This strategy calls for deploying Border Patrol agents directly on the border to deter illegal entry outright, rather than attempting to apprehend illegal aliens after they have entered the United States. Congress has supported expanding this strategy by providing the Border Patrol with greater funding and manpower. A key oversight issue for Congress is determining whether this strategy is effective in deterring illegal immigration.

Background

The U.S. Border Patrol's primary mission is to secure the 8,000 miles of land and water boundaries of the United States between ports of entry. The Border Patrol's major objectives are to prevent illegal entry into the United States, interdict drug smugglers and other criminals, and compel those persons seeking admission to present themselves legally at ports of entry for inspection. The Border Patrol is an enforcement division of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) — the primary agency in the Department of Justice (DOJ) charged with administering the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). In contrast to the Border Patrol's mission, INS Inspections and the U.S. Customs Service (a division of the Department of Treasury) share jurisdiction over ports of entry. INS Inspections is responsible for screening travelers seeking admission; the Customs Service is responsible for clearing the entry of goods and merchandise into the country. Under current law, both agencies are cross-designated to enforce each other's respective areas of the law. Further, inspectors from both agencies are cross-designated to enforce federal drug laws. Consequently, INS inspectors, like their Custom's counterparts, interdict inadmissible aliens, contraband, and drugs.

Prevention through Deterrence

In the closing weeks of FY1993, the El Paso Border Patrol Chief launched Operation Hold the Line. This operation was a concerted effort to deter illegal entry by significantly

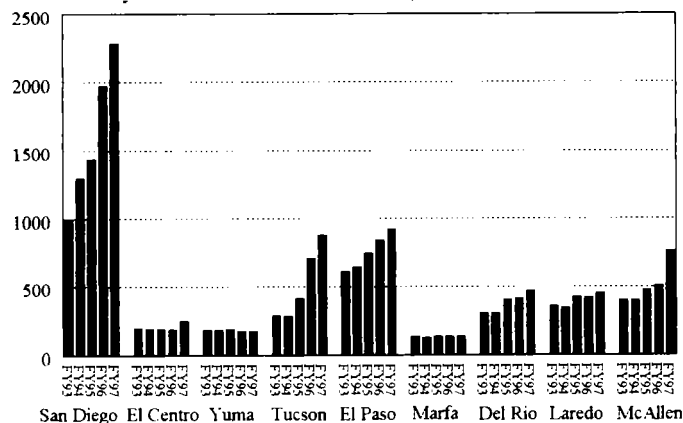
increasing line watch operations by deploying 400 of El Paso's 650 Border Patrol agents on a 24-hour-per-day, 7-day-per-week basis, along the 20 miles of border in metropolitan El Paso. As Border Patrol apprehensions and petty crime rates dropped in El Paso, the operation was hailed as a critical success in the popular press. However, initially official reaction to the operation was mixed. Nonetheless, 54 additional agents were redeployed from other sectors to El Paso and the operation was continued, and apprehensions decreased by 72% in FY1994. In time, Operation Hold the Line became the basis for the comprehensive border control strategy adopted by INS in FY1995 known as "prevention through deterrence." This strategy calls for deploying Border Patrol agents at the border to prevent and deter illegal entry, rather than apprehending undocumented immigrants after they have entered the United States.

The "prevention" strategy was a significant departure from the past. Over the years, the Border Patrol had increased its interior operations, which included activities traditionally assigned to INS Investigations, e.g., employer sanctions enforcement, alien smuggling and immigration fraud investigations, and criminal alien checks in county and local jails. As a result, line watch operations decreased. As undocumented immigrants entered the country more easily, often mingling with legal residents, it became more difficult for Border Patrol agents to differentiate between legal residents and illegal aliens (undocumented immigrants), and the number of allegations of Border Patrol agents violating the civil rights of Hispanics increased. The "prevention" strategy, however, entails focusing Border Patrol efforts at the border, particularly around major ports-of-entry, where the immigration violations are obvious. Moreover, under ideal conditions, preventing illegal entry would eliminate the need to detain and process for arrest apprehended aliens. In the meantime, this strategy — even with technological enhancements, e.g., encrypted radios, motion and seismic sensors, night vision goggles, and infrared scopes — is labor intensive. A key oversight issue for Congress is determining whether this strategy is effective in deterring illegal immigration and, if so, providing the Border Patrol with an adequate level of resources to fully implement it.

Border Patrol Manpower and Funding

Between FY1993 and FY1997, Congress has substantially increased the Border Patrol's budget, from \$362 million to \$727 million, and the number of Border Patrol agents has increased from 3,991 to 6,848. Congress funds the Border Patrol in the annual Commerce, Justice, State (CJS) appropriations bill. Although there is no line item for the Border Patrol in the INS account, in recent years, Congress has earmarked specific budget increases for the Border Patrol in terms of both dollars and new positions. For FY1998, both the Senate and House-passed CJS appropriations bills (H.R. 2267)

Chart 1. Border Patrol Agents on Duty
By Southwest Border Sector, FY1993-FY1997



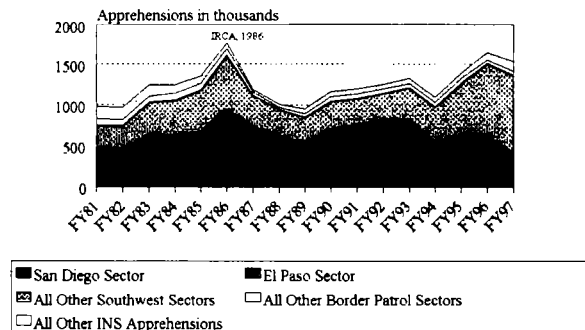
CRS presentation of U.S. Border Patrol data as of 9/27/97.

include \$125 million earmarked to hire an additional 1,000 Border Patrol agents in FY1998 — double the Administration's request. Such an increase would bring the Border Patrol to over 7,700 agents. In addition, Senate report language directs INS to deploy two-thirds of the newly funded Border Patrol agents to sectors in Texas other than El Paso. House report language directs the agency to deploy the new agents to areas with the highest levels of illegal traffic. Such report language indicates that the regional allocation of Border Patrol assets is an issue in this year's budget process. In FY1997, 92% of Border Patrol agents were deployed on the Southwest border, 42% in the San Diego sector (which accounts for 3% of the Southwest Border). Almost half of new Border Patrol agents hired since FY1993 have been deployed to the San Diego sector.

Border Patrol Apprehensions

In FY1997, INS apprehended 1.5 million undocumented immigrants. Of this number, the Border Patrol apprehended 1.4 million (a 9% decrease from FY1996); 97% were apprehended on the Southwest Border. Apprehension statistics, however, are an imperfect gauge of illegal immigration for several reasons. One, apprehensions are a measure of events rather than people, and undocumented immigrants are often apprehended more than once. Two, many undocumented immigrants enter the country legally through ports of entry and subsequently violate the terms of their admission by overstaying (up to 40% of the resident illegal alien population, according to recent INS estimates). And, three, apprehension statistics do not capture the number of aliens who elude the Border Patrol. Many factors drive apprehensions. For example, INS and others attributed the FY1994 dip in apprehensions to an economic recession in California, while they attributed the increase in FY1995 to the Mexican peso devaluation. Furthermore, increased Border Patrol strength has led to more apprehensions in some areas and less in others where deterrence has been achieved. However, while apprehension statistics cannot tell the full extent of illegal immigration, they remain a useful indicator of the flow of undocumented immigrants across the Southwest border.

Chart 2. INS & Border Patrol Alien Apprehensions Southwest Border in Comparison, FY1981-FY1997

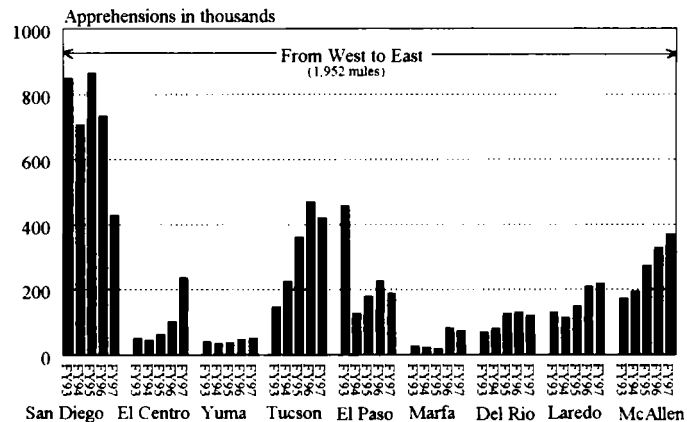


CRS presentation of INS Statistics Division data.

From the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, the Southwest border is 1,952 miles long. The Border Patrol divides coverage of the Southwest border into nine sectors: San Diego and El Centro in California; Yuma and Tucson in Arizona; El Paso sector covering New Mexico and the western most portion of Texas; and Marfa, Del Rio, Laredo, and McAllen sectors covering the remaining border in Texas. For many years, the San Diego and El Paso sectors accounted for the greatest number of alien apprehensions. Prior to Operation Hold the Line, increased apprehensions served as the measure of Border Patrol effectiveness. However, in sectors where Border Patrol strength sufficed to deter illegal entry, decreased apprehensions became the mark of Border Patrol effectiveness. Nevertheless, in FY1994, apprehensions overall continued to rise as the flow of undocumented immigrants shifted from El Paso and San Diego, where Border Patrol

strength had been increased, to other sectors on the Southwest border less well manned. As a result, the Tucson and McAllen sectors surpassed El Paso as the sectors with the second and third highest number of apprehensions. Similarly, apprehensions also increased dramatically in the El Centro sector in FY1997 as smuggling networks rerouted aliens from the Tijuana/San Diego corridor.

**Chart 3. Border Patrol Apprehensions on the Southwest Border
FY1993-FY1997 in Comparison, by Sector**



CRS presentation of INS Statistics Division data as of October 1, 1997.

Entry without inspection is a criminal offense, but it is a misdemeanor for a first-time offense. For subsequent reentries following prosecution, however, it is a felony offense that carries a federal prison sentence ranging from 5 to 20 years. Generally, prosecutions under the misdemeanor provision have not been a priority and the majority of aliens apprehended at the border accept voluntary departure. In addition, identification of unauthorized migrants attempting multiple crossings was until recently nearly impossible since Border Patrol arrest records and fingerprint cards were taken and stored manually. In FY1994, the INS began testing two automated border control systems on a pilot basis. These systems are ENFORCE, a case processing system, and IDENT, a fingerprint-based positive identification system. When fully operational, these programs will allow INS to compile valuable data on identity, rates of recidivism, and nationality of apprehended aliens. Although IDENT is deployed in every sector, to date there is no connectivity between sectors, and often no connectivity between stations within sectors. Nevertheless, IDENT has already allowed the Border Patrol to identify repeat offenders, criminal aliens, and smugglers for prosecution. The Administration's "Border Czar," U.S. Attorney Alan Bersin, has described IDENT as the "linchpin" to federal efforts on the Southwest border.

Operation Gatekeeper

Following El Paso's Operation Hold the Line, Congress and the public pressured the INS to replicate that operation in the San Diego. Conditions in San Diego, however, made a "Hold the Line" approach more difficult than in El Paso. First, the San Diego-Tijuana corridor is the busiest border crossing point in the United States: correspondingly, the Border Patrol apprehends more undocumented immigrants in San Diego than in any other sector. Second, the border is not clearly demarcated by the Tijuana river as it is by the Rio Grande in El Paso. Third, sociologists studying illegal immigration have long noted that undocumented immigrants crossing in San Diego have usually traveled long distances from points far in the interior of Mexico. Thus, they are more likely to hire a guide or smuggler, are more determined to cross, and are more likely to attempt multiple crossings. For many years, the western-most portion of the San Diego sector, from the Pacific Ocean to the San Ysidro mountains (14 miles), was a no man's land, where large bands of undocumented immigrants gathered on the U.S. side of the border on a nightly basis. Directed by alien smugglers, these bands routinely overwhelmed Border Patrol agents by rushing their positions en masse. Other criminals preyed on undocumented immigrants,

and armed robberies, rapes, and murders were common. Moreover, drug smugglers often drove across open areas of the border, leading Border Patrol agents and other law enforcement officers in high speed vehicular pursuits. To impede this illegal cross-border traffic, INS erected 14 miles of fence constructed of surplus military landing mat and installed permanent stadium style lights, since most crossings are attempted at night.

In FY1995, INS deployed new resources to San Diego, and the Border Patrol launched Operation Gatekeeper in this first 14 miles of the border (covered by the Imperial Beach, Chula Vista, and Brownsfield stations). Gradually, the flow of undocumented immigrants shifted into the mountainous backcountry of East San Diego County, and the cost of crossing increased dramatically. Indeed, there has been significant loss of life on the part of migrants who have perished due exposure to the elements and other accidents, such as falling off cliffs (one Border Patrol agent has died in such a fall). In addition, undocumented immigrants have become more dependent on smugglers to guide them across the border to highway pickup points. To interdict such traffic, the Border Patrol set up highway checkpoints on major East-West corridors in East San Diego County. As a result, high-speed vehicular pursuits have increased as alien smugglers attempt to evade the Border Patrol. These pursuits have often resulted in crashes in which a number of undocumented aliens have either been severely injured or lost their lives.

Meanwhile, at the San Diego ports of entry (San Ysidro and Otay Mesa), INS inspectors encountered increased numbers of inadmissible aliens, particularly women who would rather take their chances by attempting to cross at a port of entry with either fraudulent or altered documents, or by making a false claim to U.S. citizenship, than by making the trek across East San Diego County. In addition to "mala fide" (bad faith) applicants for admission, inspectors encountered increasing numbers of lane runners and port crashers. Lane running occurs when aliens jump out of a vehicle and rush the inspections booths in an attempt to overwhelm the inspectors on duty. Port crashing occurs when an alien is able to gain enough speed while approaching an inspection booth that he can crash the gate with his vehicle. Hence, as Border Patrol strength is increased, pressure often mounts at ports of entry. Furthermore, detention needs increase as well, since to deter such attempts, mala fide applicants for admission and other criminals need to be detained for prosecution. The Administration's FY1998 request included funding for a 1,000 bed contract detention center near Otay Mesa. In FY1995, the interdiction of aliens committing immigration violations in San Diego prompted the Executive Office of Immigration Reform (EOIR), in conjunction with INS and the U.S. Attorney's Office in Southern California, to establish a port court at the Otay Mesa port of entry. EOIR, a branch of the DOJ, is separate from INS. Among other things, EOIR presides over administrative immigration hearings. At the Otay Mesa port court, Immigration Judges conduct hearings during which persons charged with immigration offenses, if found guilty, are administratively excluded from entry. If they are interdicted again following an administrative sanction, they may face prosecution for felony reentry.

Operation Safeguard and Rio Grande

Coinciding with Operation Gatekeeper, the Border Patrol launched Operation Safeguard in the Tucson sector to cope with the increased flow of undocumented immigrants there. More recently, in August 1997, INS launched Operation Rio Grande in the McAllen sector of Texas. In these operations, the Border Patrol adopted measures developed as part of Operations Hold the Line and Gatekeeper, including the installation

of landing mat fence and stadium style lighting. Other resources have been committed as well, such as night vision scopes, additional sensors, etc. Apprehension statistics indicate that these operations are developing along lines similar to Operation Gatekeeper. However, every sector presents the Border Patrol with new challenges. For example, in the Tucson sector, the terrain is extremely mountainous with the ranges running in a north-south direction—ideal for smuggling. In FY1997, the focus on border control shifted to the McAllen sector in Texas, where the Rio Grande river twists and turns through farmlands and marshes as it empties into the Gulf of Mexico. Here, the Border Patrol has relied for the most part on highway checkpoints on major north-south routes to interdict undocumented immigrants. Only recently, with the launching of Operation Rio Grande in the area of downtown Brownsville-Matamoros, has the Border Patrol adopted a “prevention” strategy in this sector. It is the Border Patrol’s stated objective to expand the “prevention” strategy “up river” in the Laredo, Del Rio and Marfa sectors.

Although it is still too early to declare the “prevention” strategy a success overall, it is clear that a greater Border Patrol presence has slowly ratcheted up the cost of illegal entry. It has also increased tensions in the trans-border region among those who have traditionally profited from a state of lawlessness.

Violence on the Southwest Border

By virtue of their occupations, Border Patrol agents face the threat of violence on the Southwest border. In May and June 1997, there were seven confirmed cases in which snipers fired on Border Patrol agents from the Mexican side of the border in the San Diego/Tijuana area. There have been other shootings in both Sunland Park, NM, and Nogales, AZ. These and other unconfirmed events suggest an upsurge in violence on the Southwest border. Adversaries faced by the Border Patrol on the Southwest border can be categorized into four major groups: drug smugglers, alien smugglers, unauthorized migrants, and border bandits. Clearly drug smugglers pose the greatest threat to both agents and inspectors. Because of the high monetary value of the contraband and inherent risks of their activities, drug smugglers often resort to violence. They have been encountered armed with automatic rifles, body armor, night vision devices, and encrypted radios. In one such encounter, a Border Patrol agent was shot to death by drug smugglers in 1996 near Eagle Pass, TX.

In the past, alien smugglers and their charges posed no serious threat to Border Patrol agents. However, increased border enforcement has driven up fees undocumented immigrants pay smugglers for their services, and alien smuggling has often become more lucrative than drug smuggling. Nevertheless, on the whole, unauthorized migrants by themselves pose little or no threat to the Border Patrol. Most migrants do not resist arrest, once apprehended. Many have relatives in the U.S. and may be eligible for legal immigration benefits in the future; a criminal record would preclude them from such a benefit. “Border bandits”, on the other hand, pose a much greater threat to the Border Patrol. These aliens cross the border to commit crimes of opportunity, which range from panhandling and shoplifting to burglary and auto theft. Border Patrol agents and other law enforcement officers have observed that border bandits have become more aggressive in recent years. On the other hand, federal law enforcement statistics show decreases in serious crimes from FY1992 to FY1995. According to the Attorney General, serious crime has decreased by 30% in San Diego; by 5% in Nogales, AZ; by 14% in El Paso; and by 20% in Brownsville, TX.