Border Agency Computers Fail To Screen Aliens Entering With "Harmful Intent"

The computer system used by the Department of Homeland Security's front-line border protection agency is slow, frequently blacks out and can't prevent the entry of inadmissible aliens with "harmful intent," a disturbing federal audit reveals. Incredibly, thousands of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents rely on the flawed information technology (IT) system to fulfill their duty of securing the nation's borders and keeping terrorists and their weapons out of the United States.

"CBP's IT systems and infrastructure did not fully support its border security objective of preventing the entry of inadmissible aliens to the country," a DHS Inspector General (IG) report states. The IG Report continues:

"The slow performance of a critical pre-screening system greatly reduced Office of Field Operations officers' ability to identify any passengers who may represent concerns, including national security threats. Further, incoming passenger screening at U.S. international airports was hampered by frequent system outages that created passenger delays and public safety risks. The outages required that CBP officers rely on backup systems that weakened the screening process, leading to officers potentially being unable to identify travelers that may be attempting to enter the United States with harmful intent."

This may seem inconceivable 16 years after the worst terrorist attack on American soil. CBP is one of the world's largest law enforcement agencies, with 60,000 employees and annual budget of around $13 billion. It's a crucial DHS agency that must balance national security with facilitating lawful international travel and trade. On a typical day, CBP processes more than a million passengers and pedestrians, 280,000 vehicles and conducts more than 1,000 apprehensions. The agency also has Air and Marine Operations that protect sea borders by intercepting inadmissible aliens and cargo approaching American borders. The division has about 1,800

CBP's IT Systems and Infrastructure Did Not Fully Support Border Security Operations

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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Department of Homeland Security Inspector General Report on the inadequacies of Customs and Border Protection's IT systems and organizational infrastructure to carry out its mission to safeguard America's borders

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"Frequent network outages hindered air and marine surveillance operations, greatly reducing the situational awareness needed to detect inadmissible aliens and cargo approaching U.S. borders."
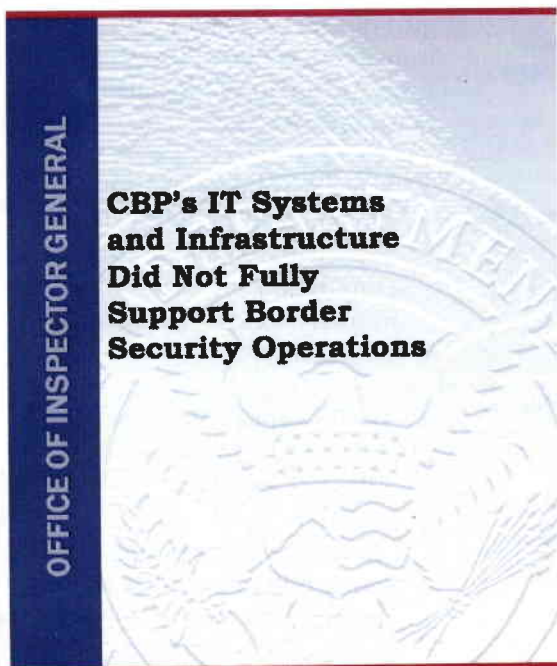
~ Homeland Security Inspector General Report

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agents, 240 aircraft and 300 marine vessels throughout the U.S., Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

The agency watchdog found that "frequent network outages hindered air and marine surveillance operations, greatly reducing the situational awareness needed to detect inadmissible aliens and cargo approaching U.S. borders."

Information technology is a critical part of CBP's operations, and the agency has a special Assistant Commissioner of the Office of Information and Technology to ensure everything is functioning properly. The office is charged with providing effective technology, infrastructure and communications to adequately carry out border security operations. It's also well-funded to the tune of $1.4 billion in 2016, the DHS IG report says. That accounts for the largest IT budget within DHS, comprising around 23 percent of Homeland Security's $6.2 billion IT budget. The CBP IT division also has a staff of around 5,200, including nearly 2,000 federal employees and

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thousands of contractors. This is a big-time and handsomely funded enterprise that should run smoothly and effectively. Instead, it is notorious for being inefficient and dangerously unreliable.

As an example of traveler delays and safety issues, the IG report offers recent system outages that affected about 119,774 international travelers nationwide. More than 10,000, travelers arrived at Miami International Airport, and the backlog created "hazards and security concerns," the audit says. CBP had to call local police and fire departments to help mitigate the risks, and 258 CBP officers worked 762 overtime hours, resulting in more than $58,000 in overtime pay. The incident "created numerous secondary challenges and risks, including difficulties with crowd control, temperature, health emergencies and officer and public

Border fence separating San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico

safety," according to the audit.

Border Patrol agents face similar issues with a system known as "e3" that is famously slow and suffers many outages. Agents are frequently unable to carry out border apprehension and enforcement activities, Homeland Security investigators found, with the most common outag-

es related to a key portal that shares information in real time with Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Some of the outages were prolonged and others occurred monthly. "The most significant impact of outages and slow processing in the e3 system was Border Patrol agents' inability to meet court deadlines for submitting information about criminal aliens for possible prosecution," the report states. For example, 48 individuals apprehended in the Tucson sector of the southwest border were not prosecuted in 2015 due to late records submissions. The same Border Patrol sector missed the deadline for transferring records for another 36 individuals due to e3 system failures.

CBP management does not dispute any of the findings in this alarming report. The question is, what will the agency do to fix the problem? (JW)

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[The examples are redacted but one line reads:] Make donations to categories of entities we have specified (as opposed to what the bank might normally choose to donate to)."

A House Judiciary Committee investigation determined earlier this year that Justice used the mandatory donations to direct almost a billion dollars to liberal activist groups in just two years. It gets better. The congressional probe found that "activist groups which stood to gain from mandatory donation provisions were involved in placing those provisions in the settlements." Thankfully, Trump Attorney General Jeff Sessions put an end to the madness last summer, writing in a memo that the Department of Justice will no longer engage in the practice:

"Effective immediately, Department attorneys may not enter into any agreement on behalf of the United States in settlement of federal claims or charges, including agreements settling civil litigation, accepting plea agreements, or deferring or declining prosecution in a criminal matter, that directs or provides for a payment or loan to any non-governmental person or entity that is not a party to the dispute."

A new administration could reverse the directive, however, so the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Virginia Republican Robert Goodlatte, introduced a bill that will ban all federal agencies from funneling money to third parties that weren't victims in government lawsuits. The measure appears to have bipartisan support and does not affect payments to pro-

vide restitution to victims that have suffered harm. "It was obvious from the outset that mandatory-donation provisions create opportunities for abuse," Congressman Goodlatte said in a statement. "That such abuses actually occurred is now proven."

The Obama administration also used the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as a political tool to target conservatives. Judicial Watch uncovered that major scandal and sued to obtain droves of government documents showing how the agency singled out groups with conservative-sounding terms such as "Patriot" and "Tea Party" in their titles when applying for tax-exempt status. The Obama IRS also illegally colluded with another government agency — the Federal Election Commission — to crack down on conservative nonprofits during the 2012 election cycle. (JW)