

# Southwest Border Strategic Concept of Operations (CONOP)

*Southwest Border Coordination Center*

*March 28, 2022*



This page intentionally left blank

---

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
1. Purpose .....	1
2. Background.....	1
3. Current Situation.....	2
Operational Concept .....	4
1. Organizational Structure.....	4
2. Incident Action Planning Process Integration .....	4
3. Incident Approach and Lines of Effort.....	4
4. Lines of Operation.....	5
5. Current Strategies.....	5
5.1. Resource Requirements and Management: Optimizing Effort.....	6
5.2. Contracting and Funding: Creating Additional Capacity .....	7
5.3. External and International Partner Engagement: Partnering to Achieve Outcomes ..	8
6. Long Term Strategies.....	9
Communication Structure.....	10
1. Reporting Structure .....	10
2. Synchronized Operations Tempo.....	10
3. Strategic Communications with External and International Partners.....	10
Appendix A: Maps.....	11

# Introduction

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of the Southwest Border Strategic Concept of Operations (CONOP) is to support decision making in response to increased irregular migration at the Southwest Border of the United States. This CONOP focuses on supporting the execution of a highly integrated, whole-of-government response to execute and coordinate a comprehensive plan that enables a secure, orderly, and humane process at the border. Command and coordination are a critical element of any effective response activity, and this CONOP will support the alignment of efforts vertically and horizontally within the federal government and with state and local partners as well as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

This CONOP identifies joint objectives, major tasks, and resources required across each phase. The tasks and method of execution recommended will assist the Southwest Border Coordination Center (SBCC) in making decisions and determining progress in the event of a significant increase in irregular migration along the Southwest Border.

## 2. Background

During the past few years, irregular migration along the Southwest Border has increased to unprecedented levels. In addition to the increased migration, DHS is seeing a pronounced shift in the demographics and nationalities of noncitizens being encountered at the land border that impacts its processes. Major factors contributing to this irregular migration are severe weather events, earthquakes, natural disasters, and severe economic decline causing food and housing insecurity in countries within the Southwest Border Immigration Enforcement Zone (SWB-IEZ). Other contributing factors include crime and corruption, stunted economic growth, lack of education and healthcare, the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as economic inequality within countries of origin.

In addition, any future lifting of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) order under Title 42<sup>1</sup> will likely cause a significant increase in arrivals along all United States (U.S.) borders – primarily along the Southwest Border.

Individuals who cross the border without legal authorization are placed into removal proceedings and, if unable to establish a legal basis to remain in the United States, expeditiously removed. Attempting to enter the United States without authorization carries potential long-term consequences, including removal from the United States and bars to future immigration benefits. By expeditiously removing

---

<sup>1</sup> Title 42, Public Health Reassessment and Order Suspending the Right to Introduce Persons from Countries Where a Quarantinable Communicable Disease Exists, 86 Fed. Reg. 42,828 (August 5, 2021)

individuals that do not have a lawful basis to stay, the United States is making clear that those who do not qualify to remain will be promptly removed.

On February 2, 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 14010 *Creating a Comprehensive Regional Framework to Address the Causes of Migration, to Manage Migration Throughout North and Central America, and to Provide Safe and Orderly Processing of Asylum Seekers at the United States Border*. As the federal agency with statutory authority for protecting the United States borders, the Department of Homeland Security and its component agencies acted pursuant to the President's Executive Order.

During the fall of 2021 and winter of 2022, in addition to internal preparations being made by CBP, ICE, FEMA, and other DHS entities were tasked to provide technical assistance and support, such as conducting and participating in tabletop exercises with CBP sector staff and leadership, and site visits.

The Southwest Border Action Group (SWBAG) and Southwest Border Coordination Center (SBCC) were established in Washington, DC, to oversee resource allocation and Southwest Border support. In mid-March of 2022, utilizing NIMS organizational concepts, the SWBAG was transitioned to the CBP Emergency Operations Center (CBP EOC). The CBP EOC and SBCC were integrated with the existing field structure and then combined into a single command element. This element retains the SBCC title to foster interagency collaboration as preparedness efforts.

The SBCC was formally established on February 17, 2022. On March 18, 2022, the Secretary of Homeland Security appointed MaryAnn Tierney, FEMA Region 3's Regional Administrator as the DHS Senior Coordinating Official (SCO) for an interim period and Matthew Hudak, Deputy Chief of the U.S. Border Patrol as the Deputy SCO.

### **3. Current Situation**

The 7-day average for CBP daily encounters at the Southwest Border is 7,101 as of March 28, 2022. CBP has recorded more than 900,000 encounters in Fiscal Year 2022, a 99 percent increase from that same time frame in Fiscal Year 2021. CBP has maximized deployment of resources along the Southwest Border and has moved resources from across the country to meet growing demands. For example, CBP has deployed approximately 400 agents from the Northern and Coastal Borders to support operations along the Southwest Border. Transportation, medical service providers, law enforcement personnel, and holding facilities are all being strained to maintain current operations.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is currently in Phase 1, Initial Influx<sup>2</sup>. There are three other Phases:

---

<sup>2</sup> 75% to 100% (11,250-15,000) Pre-COVID Capacity across all SWB sectors/field offices

- Phase 2, Major Influx: 100% pre-COVID Capacity (over 15,000) across all SWB sectors/field offices or a daily average of 5,000 encounters in a single sector over a 72-hour period
- Phase 3, Mass Irregular Migration: 100% pre-COVID capacity (over 15,000) across all SWB sectors/field offices and a daily average of 5,000 encounters in a single SWB sector/field office or a SWB wide daily average of 9,000 encounters over a 72-hour period
- Phase 4, Transition to Steady State: SCO/SRO with Direction from the Secretary will commence standing down of the SBCC and transfer of capacity and coordination to CBP, ICE, and USCIS

The Secretary of Homeland Security determines the Phase.

CBP is currently assisting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in enforcing the CDC's Order *Suspending Introduction of Persons from a Country Where a Communicable Disease Exists* (March 20, 2020), as amended, and extended, in addition to executing its border security mission. Pursuant to this Order, DHS is expelling single adults and family units encountered at the border. Once this Order is lifted, DHS anticipates a significant increase in migration and enforcement encounters.

The DHS Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) produced projections for post-Title 42 Southwest Border encounters describing low, medium, high, or very high encounter scenarios. These scenarios underpin planning assumptions that generate requirements which in turn drive operational execution. Based on these projections the SBCC is currently planning for 6,000, 12,000 (high) and 18,000 (very high) encounters per day.

# Operational Concept

## 1. Organizational Structure

The SBCC and the CBP EOC are co-located and integrated to achieve operational efficiencies. At the field level, CBP has designed Lead Field Coordinators to oversee operations in regions aligned to FEMA Regions 6 and 9. The LFCs are senior officials from CBP and are empowered with incident-level tactical control. The SBCC supports the LFCs by leveraging the interagency to address complex policy issues and adjudicate resource requests.

Command and General Staff positions within the SBCC have been filled by members of DHS, CBP, and ICE. The SBCC also contains representative from across the federal government, such as DOD and DOJ. FEMA deployed two National Incident Management Assistance Teams to the SBCC to provide incident management technical assistance, augment support, and assist in the development and training of a future CBP IMAT structure. The United States Coast Guard has deployed Incident Management Teams to each LFC to support their incident management organizations.

## 2. Incident Action Planning Process Integration

The SBCC is applying the Incident Action Planning Process to address emerging resource requirements. This process allows for the formal documentation of incident goals, operational period objectives, and the response strategy defined by Senior Coordinating Official. This ensures a collaborative whole-of-government approach to assigning tasks to meet objectives which are regularly reviewed and updated as the situation progresses.

## 3. Incident Approach and Lines of Effort

Lines of Effort (LOEs) are utilized to focus mission sets and objectives that transcend multiple operational periods at a strategic level. The LOEs are:

1. **Integrated Operations**. Anticipatory coordination operations and actions focused on developing the organizational structure to respond to irregular migration along the southwest boarder.
2. **Infrastructure and Resources**. Anticipatory coordination operations and actions focused on establishing the necessary infrastructure and capacity to respond to irregular migration along the southwest boarder.
3. **External Collaboration and Coordination**. Establishing and implementing the necessary multi-agency communication architecture to facilitate efforts with homeland security enterprise partners domestically and abroad.
4. **Strategic Communications**. Establishing partnerships across the SWB-IMZ through detailed partner outreach and coordinated messaging efforts to support the achievement of the other three lines of effort.

## 4. Lines of Operation

The lines of effort are tactically implemented through Lines of Operation (LOOs). LOOs bucket interim objectives and resources required in conjunction with current incident data to ensure appropriate resources are allocated in a timely manner, connecting strategic planning to tactical level execution.

The table below shows how LOEs are executed through LOOs.

<b>DHS LOE CBP LOO</b>	<b>Integrated Operations</b>	<b>Infrastructure &amp; Resources</b>	<b>External Collaboration</b>	<b>Strategic Communication</b>
<b>Intelligence</b>	X	X	X	
<b>Processing</b>	X	X		X
<b>Transportation</b>		X		
<b>Medical</b>	X	X	X	X
<b>Personnel</b>	X	X		X
<b>Security</b>	X	X		
<b>Facilities</b>	X	X		X
<b>International Engagement</b>	X		X	X
<b>Finance, Procurement, Resources</b>	X	X		X
<b>Partnerships</b>	X	X	X	X

## 5. Current Strategies

The SBCC has identified strategies that aim to decompress the immigration system in the near term. Implementing these strategies capitalizes on ongoing work and facilitates the streamlining of future operations. The strategies are designed to enable a secure, orderly, and humane process at the border that prioritizes life safety, national security, and process efficiency and is inclusive of leaders from state and local governments, specifically border communities, and NGOs that support noncitizens.



The SBCC coordinates the response to the influx of noncitizens crossing the Southwest Border and ensures strategies and deliverables are coordinated across the interagency within the framework of applicable statute, regulation, and policy.

CBP's goal at Border Patrol Stations is to achieve equilibrium between encounters and holding as defined by a ratio of total noncitizens in custody being twice the number of encounters over a 7-day average. The goal at Ports of Entry (POE) is measured by limited or no operational degradation to the supply chain and economic/national security which allows for maintaining throughput rates, facilitation of lawful trade and travel, as well as current enforcement efforts, while efficiently and expeditiously processing increasing volumes of undocumented noncitizens arriving at POEs.

CBP will achieve these goals by employing several strategies focused on decompression, such as lateral transfers between stations over capacity and those with excess capacity and transfer to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) for expedited removal, regular detention, and in certain situations parole coupled with alternatives to detention.

The operational architecture described in this CONOP will enable field level commanders to apportion resources assigned to their areas of responsibility to meet emergent requirements.

## **5.1. Resource Requirements and Management: Optimizing Effort**

Implementing a comprehensive resource management process will facilitate the adjudication of requests, tracking of request fulfillment, and the monitoring of resource employment. Primary Lines of Operation to ensure successful support to Southwest Border operations include personnel, transportation, medical augmentation, and facilities. WebEOC, a web-based incident management software system used throughout the country and by many federal agencies, will be utilized to manage the resource request process.

CBP has developed requirements to meet the capacity called for by planning assumptions generated from DHS OIS Projections by lines of operation as delineated below.

- Transportation
- Facilities
- Personnel
- Medical
- Intelligence

**Transportation** capability currently relies on organic and contracted ground assets and contracted air assets to move close to 5,000 noncitizens on the ground and over 350<sup>3</sup> noncitizens via air lift a day.

---

<sup>3</sup> Averaged out over 7 days, actual airlifts tracked by week

In the event “very high” projections are realized, CBP will need to more than double that. This gap can be filled through Interagency Agreements and new contracts.

CBP’s **holding facilities** currently can hold over 16,000 noncitizens with expansion to 17,000<sup>4</sup> through the addition of soft-sided facilities scheduled to come online in early April. Existing contracts will be expanded to close the gap to the projected potential for 25,000-30,000 noncitizens in custody under the very high scenario.

**Law enforcement and general-purpose staffing** needs will also be a challenge, if CBP approaches the number of encounters contemplated under High and Very High Projections.

The requirement for a potential additional 1,500-2,500 (high/very high) **Law Enforcement Officers (LEO)** must be sourced as part of a whole-of-government approach bringing in LEOs from other DHS Components and other federal agencies.

The requirement for **general purpose staffing** support can be closed with a whole-of-government approach as well as through contract vehicles. To support processing non-citizens and maintain adequate holding conditions there will be a need for an additional 2,507-2,750 (high/very high) staff.

**Medical staffing** is currently supported through contracted solutions. This staffing will need to expand in concert with the number of non-citizens in holding to maintain adequate care. Under the very high scenario, to support several shifts for up to 30,000 non-citizens in custody, an additional 360 Providers and 720 Support Staff will be required. Some current contracts will require re-competition to meet this need.

Current **intelligence capabilities** support the CBP’s global posture but cannot accurately forecast the timing, location, or composition of migrant surges with sufficient lead time to inform resource allocation decisions along the Southwest Border. Responding to “high” and “very high” irregular migration projections will require a dedicated intelligence fusion cell with contractors and support from the Intelligence Community.

## 5.2. Contracting and Funding: Creating Additional Capacity

In FY 2022, DHS received annual appropriations that will help the department to handle elevated levels of irregular migration across the southwest border. The DHS appropriation provided additional resources in a number of key areas, most notably discrete appropriations of \$1.4 billion for CBP, ICE, and FEMA to address elevated levels of irregular migration in 2022. The base appropriation and these additional resources provide DHS with flexibility to address significantly elevated levels of

---

<sup>4</sup> All holding numbers presented assume the removal of COVID-19 capacity restrictions

migration. DHS is currently developing a spend plan associated with the \$1.4 billion in supplemental border funds and is using this CONOPs to inform development of the spend plan.

While the 2022 appropriation exceeded the request and represents a historic funding level for DHS, the appropriation would not be sufficient to fund the potential resource requirements associated with Phase 2 and Phase 3 Operations in this plan. DHS will fund operational requirements, including those potential requirements outlined in this plan, by prudently executing its appropriations as outlined in forthcoming spend plans; reprioritizing and reallocating existing funding through reprogrammings and transfers; requesting support from other Federal agencies; and finally by engaging with Congress on any potential need for supplemental appropriations, as necessary.

Furthermore, agreements or contracts with private sector and VOAD businesses and organizations will be essential to achieve stability. Contracting and funding strategies must articulate requirements, sourcing considerations, and future actions to enable LOO execution and relieve pressure on the immigration system.

### **5.3. External and International Partner Engagement: Partnering to Achieve Outcomes**

Addressing the high volume of encounters will require a collective effort between the government and NGO partner organizations. DHS and partners will prioritize the health, safety, and security of its personnel, the noncitizens in its custody and care, and border communities.

Different sectors and border communities require different resources. This CONOP supports tactical implementation that provides for ongoing consultation with state and local government leaders and NGOs, including those providing services to noncitizens.

NGOs provide skillsets, resources, and operational experience necessary to support a specific subset of non-citizens encountered. There must be seamless coordination and transition between the government's responsibilities and the humanitarian missions of NGOs within the area of the Southwest Border. Implementing this strategy will streamline the transfer process outside of CBP custody and build capacity to address the potential for future surges.

State and local government leaders are also important partners. This CONOP provides the necessary structure and resource management to address the community impact of increased noncitizen flows as well as to partner with governments to address gaps in services.

International considerations are being addressed by the Department of State and DHS components and offices with respective authorities and responsibilities. The Administration has outlined a comprehensive strategy to address the root causes leading to irregular migration from Central America and restore safe, orderly, and humane migration in the Americas and is working with source and transit countries in the region to facilitate the quick return of individuals who previously resided in those countries. DHS, in coordination with the Department of State, has regular discussions with partner countries in the Hemisphere on migration related matters and continues to engage with foreign governments to improve cooperation with countries that systematically refuse or delay the

repatriation of their nationals. As part of these efforts, DOS is negotiating bilateral migration arrangements with key countries in the hemisphere. These arrangements focus on providing avenues for migrants seeking protection or resettlement, building capacity for migration authorities, and streamlining repatriations.

## **6. Long Term Strategies**

In addition to the short-term strategies, the SBCC has identified several long-term strategies that may work to prevent and limit the impacts of future surges. These include enhancing and leveraging existing partnerships with international partners and NGOs, bolstering interagency coordination, and building capacity within DHS, CBP, ICE, HHS, and DOJ. The intent of these strategies is to create a lasting, scalable, and repeatable structure to respond to irregular migration events.

# Communication Structure

## 1. Reporting Structure

To streamline communications, a multi-pronged approach will be utilized. The first prong involves upward communication from the lowest echelon through to the SBCC Planning Section. The second prong involves downward communications of Strategy from the Unified Coordination Group<sup>5</sup> (UCG), formulated into operational guidance from the SBCC, and then executed tactically at the LFC Level. Liaisons from relevant agencies such as ICE, are present with the LFCs to provide guidance and subject matter expertise relative to field-level operations.

## 2. Synchronized Operations Tempo

Through the SBCC, agency activities are coordinated and synchronized through the Incident Action Planning Process to ensure actions are coordinated and synchronized to allow for effective tasking of resources and activities. Intrinsic to this process is an operational tempo that promotes routine interagency collaboration to support operational decision-making and resource allocation.

## 3. Strategic Communications with External and International Partners

Communications will be frequent and open with Congressional members, committees, and their staffs, NGO partners, and state and local leaders. Messaging will be conducted through the utilization of traditional and social media outreach. Messaging will also include direct and ongoing contact with international and domestic relief organizations/NGOs as well as state and local government leaders.

---

<sup>5</sup> The Unified Coordination Group is the primary entity for managing and supporting operations

# Appendix A: Maps

**Region IX**  
U.S. Customs and  
Border Protection  
*Field Office Locations*



**Region VI**  
U.S. Customs and  
Border Protection  
*Field Office Locations*



