



U.S. Customs and
Border Protection
(/)

Moving People and Materials: CBP and DoD Unite to Tackle Logistics of Operation Secure Line

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The images tell part of the story: thousands of American military troops joining hundreds of U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers and Border Patrol agents as they harden the ports of entry.

While the miles and miles of concertina wire and the tons of traffic barriers to funnel the possible crush of thousands of Central American migrants through the official crossing points – along with the added personnel going to the southern border – are the most visible, an aspect not as well-known has been key to Operation Secure Line’s success: logistics.

While the Department of Defense provides people, products and expertise, it needs direction from CBP.

“In order to get direction from CBP, we connect them with people on the ground,” said Benjamin Attella, the logistics section chief in CBP’s Area

Command in Washington, D.C. “We give the idea and framework, and they provide the expertise.”

For example, the military has engineers and planners who know how to put in the concertina wire. They link up with the Office of Field Operations Special Response Team and field office members to identify where best to put in that fortification of the port of entry. “Up here at headquarters, we’re coordinating all that talking on the ground and making sure those plans are going up the right way through lead field commanders in time so they can start working,” Attella said.

The Area Command is a large conference room where every aspect of CBP operations – from Border Patrol to Air and Marine Operations to Field Operations to finance and personnel specialists, just to name a few – is stationed every day during crisis events to consult and coordinate with each other, as well as DoD partners. This nerve center was known as an emergency operations center when used to coordinate



U.S. Marines from Twenty Nine Palms, California, prepare equipment and barriers at the San Ysidro Port of Entry Nov. 13. Photo by Mani Albrecht

responses to major natural disasters, such as last year's hurricanes in Texas, Florida and the Caribbean. But the logistics coordination in this latest operation goes well beyond the walls of the room in CBP's headquarters building.

"We're providing logistics material support to the DoD force that is supporting CBP," said Ralph Laurie, who works in Colorado Springs, Colorado, as the Defense Logistics Agency liaison to the United States Northern Command, the U.S.'s defense arm responsible for homeland defense and Defense Support of Civil Authorities operations.

That support includes providing food and water for those troops sent to help CBP. In addition, the military sent barrier materials to Texas, Southern California and Arizona: approximately 36 miles of concertina wire (with more on the way), concrete and water-fillable traffic barriers, more commonly known as jersey barriers, and old metal shipping containers the military can no longer use but make for great border barriers. And those shipping containers don't cost taxpayers anything extra since they were already bought, used and are now recycled at the border. It all totals up to around \$4.3 million in materials the Defense Logistics Agency is providing so far to support Operation Secure Line. "Almost all of the material we're providing is material that we use in some way, shape or form already," Laurie said.

One thing that helped the military move so much material to the border quickly was DoD anticipating the demand, despite not having many details on what was needed and where.

"My agency simply relocated a pretty sizable inventory of fencing-type material into Southern California and Southern Texas and then held it there, so when it was needed, we could get it to that place of demand within a day, as opposed to 7-8 days," Laurie said, noting that some of the materials had to come across country from depots in Pennsylvania. "We've done similar things with the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the past."

"That's just how the military operates," Attella said, referencing how prepositioning really made a big difference. "You move your troops forward to cut back on that lag time. We train this concept and execute on a smaller scale, but to see the Army do it as doctrine with such efficiency is amazing."

Just like the experience moving materials across the country, the military is also used to building effective entry control points at its bases in the U.S. and overseas, similar to what CBP has to do with its ports of entry.

"We've had a lot of military officers up here (in the Area Command) who have a lot of experience in Afghanistan and Iraq with fortifying operating bases in hot zones," Attella said. "This is what they do. They're experts, and it shows."

While the Department of Defense has supported CBP at the border in the past, this latest effort between the military and CBP is unprecedented.

"This is an historical event," said Louis Godino, CBP's Area Command deputy commander. "CBP has never seen a mass of migrants this large come this way at once. DoD has never supported at the border like this. The military has been amazing support in getting us focused on hardening the border."

Godino said CBP is learning from its military partners and vice versa.

“I think this is just the beginning of a great partnership and an amazing learning experience for both,” he said.

Godino believes having the support of the military will help immensely as the bulk of the migrant caravans arrive at the border.

“It could make a very large difference: a show of force, a show of solidarity and unity for this country,” he said. “People with [bad intentions] that decided to come to the border now to cause a riot or cause out of control things to happen will be curtailed by the show of force by itself. We’re welcoming people to apply for asylum and do the process the right way. We’re going to be orderly.”

Laurie noted how positive it’s been working with CBP to get the troops and materials where they are needed.

“This has been an incredibly professional experience,” Laurie said. “It’s been rewarding to see how many people are working late across multiple time zones to make this happen.”

For Attella, he focuses on making sure CBP officers and Border Patrol agents have what they need, when they need it.

“We’re all in support of the people who actually make things happen on the ground. These officers and agents have been asked to work long hours under stressful conditions, and are doing it very, very well,” he said. “It’s an honor for us to help out.”

U.S. Customs and Border Protection is the unified border agency within the Department of Homeland Security charged with the management, control and protection of our nation's borders at and between official ports of entry. CBP is charged with securing the borders of the United States while enforcing hundreds of laws and facilitating lawful trade and travel.

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