



Highlights of [GAO-07-884T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The possibility that terrorists and criminals might exploit border vulnerabilities and enter the United States poses a serious security risk, especially if they were to bring radioactive material or other contraband with them. Although Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has taken steps to secure the 170 ports of entry on the northern and southern U.S. borders, Congress is concerned that unmanned and unmonitored areas between these ports of entry may be vulnerable. In unmanned locations, CBP relies on surveillance cameras, unmanned aerial drones, and other technology to monitor for illegal border activity. In unmonitored locations, CBP does not have this equipment in place and must rely on alert citizens or other information sources to meet its obligation to protect the border.

Today’s testimony will address what GAO investigators found during a limited security assessment of seven border areas that were unmanned, unmonitored, or both—four at the U.S.–Canada border and three at the U.S.–Mexico border. In three of the four locations on the U.S.–Canada border, investigators carried a duffel bag across the border to simulate the cross-border movement of radioactive materials or other contraband. Safety considerations prevented GAO investigators from attempting to cross north into the United States from a starting point in Mexico.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-884T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gregory D. Kutz (202) 512-9505 or kutzgd@gao.gov.

BORDER SECURITY

Security Vulnerabilities at Unmanned and Unmonitored U.S. Border Locations

What GAO Found

On the U.S.–Canada border, GAO found state roads close to the border that CBP did not appear to man or monitor. In some of these locations, the proximity of the road to the border allowed investigators to cross without being challenged by law enforcement, successfully simulating the cross-border movement of radioactive materials or other contraband into the United States from Canada. In one location on the northern border, the U.S. Border Patrol was alerted to GAO activities through the tip of an alert citizen. However, the responding U.S. Border Patrol agents were not able to locate GAO investigators. Also on the northern border, GAO investigators located several ports of entry that had posted daytime hours and were unmanned overnight.

On the southern border, investigators observed a large law enforcement and Army National Guard presence on a state road, including unmanned aerial vehicles. Also, GAO identified federally managed lands that were adjacent to the U.S.–Mexico border. These areas did not appear to be monitored or did not have an observable law enforcement presence, which contrasted sharply with GAO observations on the state road. Although CBP is ultimately responsible for protecting federal lands adjacent to the border, CBP officials told GAO that certain legal, environmental, and cultural considerations limit options for enforcement—for example, environmental restrictions and tribal sovereignty rights.

Summary of Selected GAO Border Security Activities

Security vulnerability	Investigator activity	Law enforcement response and additional observations
State roads close to the border	An investigator simulated the cross-border movement of radioactive materials or other contraband into the United States from Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspicious activity was reported to the U.S. Border Patrol, but responding agents were unable to locate GAO investigators and their simulated contraband
Ports of entry with posted hours	Investigators attempted to trigger a law enforcement response by taking photographs of a port of entry that had closed for the night	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A gate was placed across the road, but investigators observed it would be possible to drive around the gate U.S. Border Patrol responded 20 minutes after investigators were caught on camera at the port of entry Responding U.S. Border Patrol agent did not attempt to verify identity of investigators or search their vehicle
Federally managed lands adjacent to border	Investigators approached the U.S.–Mexico border	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No visible law enforcement response No observable electronic monitoring equipment Investigators observed evidence of frequent border crossings into the United States at this location
	Investigator stepped over a 4-foot-high border fence, entered Mexico, and returned again to the United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No visible law enforcement response No observable electronic monitoring equipment No observed law enforcement presence despite proximity to border

Source: GAO.