



Highlights of [GAO-08-131T](#), a testimony before the subcommittee on Management, Investigation, and Oversight, and Border, Maritime and Global Counterterrorism, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

In November 2005, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) established the Secure Border Initiative (SBI), a multiyear, multibillion dollar program to secure U.S. borders. One element of SBI is *SBI<sub>net</sub>*—the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) program responsible for developing a comprehensive border protection system through a mix of security infrastructure (e.g., fencing), and surveillance and communication technologies (e.g., radars, sensors, cameras, and satellite phones).

The House Committee on Homeland Security asked GAO to monitor DHS progress in implementing the *SBI<sub>net</sub>* program. This testimony provides GAO's observations on (1) *SBI<sub>net</sub>* technology implementation; (2) *SBI<sub>net</sub>* infrastructure implementation; (3) the extent to which CBP has determined the impact of *SBI<sub>net</sub>* technology and infrastructure on its workforce needs and operating procedures; and (4) how the CBP SBI Program Management Office (PMO) has defined its human capital goals and the progress it has made to achieve these goals. GAO's observations are based on analysis of DHS documentation, such as program schedules, contracts, status, and reports. GAO also conducted interviews with DHS officials and contractors, and visits to sites in the southwest border where *SBI<sub>net</sub>* deployment is underway. GAO performed the work from April 2007 through October 2007. DHS generally agreed with GAO's findings.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-131T](#). For more information, contact Richard M. Stana at (202) 512-8777 or [stanar@gao.gov](mailto:stanar@gao.gov).

## SECURE BORDER INITIATIVE

### Observations on Selected Aspects of *SBI<sub>net</sub>* Program Implementation

#### What GAO Found

DHS has made some progress to implement Project 28—the first segment of *SBI<sub>net</sub>* technology across the southwest border, but it has fallen behind its planned schedule. The *SBI<sub>net</sub>* contractor delivered the components (i.e., radars, sensors and cameras) to the Project 28 site in Tucson, Arizona on schedule. However, Project 28 is incomplete more than 4 months after it was to become operational—at which point Border Patrol agents were to begin using *SBI<sub>net</sub>* technology to support their activities. According to DHS, the delays are primarily due to software integration problems. In September 2007, DHS officials said that the Project 28 contractor was making progress in correcting the problems, but DHS was unable to specify a date when the system would be operational. Due to the slippage in completing Project 28, DHS is revising the *SBI<sub>net</sub>* implementation schedule for follow-on technology projects, but still plans to deploy technology along 387 miles of the southwest border by December 31, 2008. DHS is also taking steps to strengthen its contract management for Project 28.

*SBI<sub>net</sub>* infrastructure deployment along the southwest border is on schedule, but meeting CBP's goal to have 370 miles of pedestrian fence and 200 miles of vehicle barriers in place by December 31, 2008, may be challenging and more costly than planned. CBP met its intermediate goal to deploy 70 miles of new fencing in fiscal year 2007 and the average cost per mile was \$2.9 million. The *SBI<sub>net</sub>* PMO estimates that deployment costs for remaining fencing will be similar to those thus far. In the past, DHS has minimized infrastructure construction labor costs by using Border Patrol agents and Department of Defense military personnel. However, CBP officials report that they plan to use commercial labor for future fencing projects. The additional cost of commercial labor and potential unforeseen increases in contract costs suggest future deployment could be more costly than planned. DHS officials also reported other challenging factors they will continue to face for infrastructure deployment, including community resistance, environmental considerations, and difficulties in acquiring rights to land along the border.

The impact of *SBI<sub>net</sub>* on CBP's workforce needs and operating procedures remains unclear because the *SBI<sub>net</sub>* technology is not fully identified or deployed. CBP officials expect the number of Border Patrol agents required to meet mission needs to change from current projections, but until the system is fully deployed, the direction and magnitude of the change is unknown. For the Tucson sector, where Project 28 is being deployed, Border Patrol officials are developing a plan on how to integrate *SBI<sub>net</sub>* into their operating procedures.

The SBI PMO tripled in size during fiscal year 2007, but fell short of its staffing goal of 270 employees. Agency officials expressed concerns that staffing shortfalls could affect the agency's capacity to provide adequate contractor oversight. In addition, the *SBI<sub>net</sub>* PMO has not yet completed long-term human capital planning.