



U.S. Secret Service Protection

Overview

The U.S. Secret Service (USSS) conducts two missions—criminal investigations and protection. Criminal investigations focus primarily on financial crimes, whereas protection focuses on the safety and security of specific government officials. The criminal investigation mission is the USSS’s oldest mission; however, the protection mission is the one that receives the most public and media attention. The protection mission is the more visible, and includes the protection of the President, Vice President, their families, former Presidents, and major candidates for those offices, along with the White House and Vice President’s residences. Protective activities of the USSS also extend to foreign missions (embassies, consulates, residences, and other buildings used by foreign governments) in the District of Columbia and to designated individuals, such as the Department of Homeland Security Secretary and visiting dignitaries. Separate from protecting these specific mandated individuals, USSS is responsible for certain security activities such as National Special Security Events, which include inauguration ceremonies, major party quadrennial national conventions, as well as some international conferences and events held in the United States.

History of U.S. Secret Service Protection

In March 2003, USSS was transferred from the Department of Treasury to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). With this transfer, DHS generally, and USSS specifically became the federal department responsible for protecting significant and specified persons and property. Prior to the enactment of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the Treasury Department was responsible for this protection (through USSS) for over 100 years.

The Service has been protecting presidents from President Grover Cleveland in 1894 on a part-time basis to the continual (24 hours a day) protection of President Barack Obama today. Over the years, the USSS protection mission has been affected by unofficial decisions (such as President Cleveland’s protection) and congressional mandate (such as the protection of major presidential candidates). USSS protection activities have expanded with an increase in the number of protected individuals, while there has been only one instance of a specified type of protectee being removed from the authorized list of protectees.

Over the past century, the Service has received congressional action that focused primarily on its protection mission. The most recent congressional action includes the enactment of the Federal Restricted Buildings and Grounds Improvement Act of 2011, which amended 18 U.S.C. 1752 and made it a crime for unauthorized person to enter a building secured by USSS.

Protected Individuals and Facilities

The following are the current individuals authorized USSS protection in 18 U.S.C. Section 3056(a):

- President, Vice President, President- and Vice President- elect;
- immediate families of those listed above;
- former Presidents, their spouses, and their children under the age of 16;
- former Vice Presidents, their spouses, and their children under the age 16;
- visiting heads of foreign states or governments;
- distinguished foreign visitors and official United States representatives on special missions abroad; and
- major presidential and vice presidential candidates within 120 days of the general presidential elections, and their spouses.

The USSS is also required to secure the White House complex, the Vice President’s residence at the Naval Observatory, the Treasury Building, foreign diplomatic missions in Washington, DC, and temporarily, the personal residences of the President and Vice President. These facilities are primarily secured by the USSS’s Uniform Division.

Specific Protection Activities

As the pool of prospective protectees has evolved over time, so has the manner in which they are protected. Originally, USSS protection entailed agents being what could be described as “body guards.” Now protection operations include not only the presence of agents in close proximity to the protectee, but also advance security surveys of locations to be visited; coordination with foreign, state, and local law enforcement entities; and intelligence analysis of present and future threats. The USSS protection mission comprises human resources, physical barriers, technology, and reviews of critical infrastructure and their vulnerabilities. 18 U.S.C. 3056(e)-(f) also authorize the USSS to conduct other activities such as participating in the planning, coordination, and implementation of security operations at special events of national significance; and providing forensic and investigative assistance involving missing and exploited children.

Threats to Protectees

Presidential safety is and has been a concern throughout the nation’s history. For example, fears of kidnapping and assassination threats to Abraham Lincoln began with his journey to Washington, DC, for the 1861 inauguration. Concern for presidential safety is legitimized by the number of attempted and successful assaults against Presidents. Ten

Presidents have been victims of direct assaults by assassins, with four resulting in death (Presidents Abraham Lincoln, James A. Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy). Since the USSS started officially protecting Presidents in 1906, seven assaults have occurred, with one, President Kennedy, resulting in death. In 1917, Congress enacted legislation (39 Stat. 919) that made it a crime to threaten the President.

At a 2009 congressional hearing, former USSS Director Sullivan stated that there had been no increase in death threats to President Obama compared to the number of death threats made against former Presidents George W. Bush and William J. Clinton even though some media sources had reported otherwise. The extent to which Presidents have been threatened or targeted remains a matter of conjecture.

Recent Protection Security Breaches

On September 19, 2014, a person gained unauthorized entrance into the White House after climbing the perimeter fence. The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee held a hearing entitled “White House Perimeter Breach: New Concerns about the Secret Service,” on September 30, 2014, which addressed this breach and previous incidents. The committee inquired if deficient protection procedures, insufficient funding, inadequate funding, personnel shortages, or low morale contributed to this and past security breaches.

Later that day at the hearing, it became public that earlier in the year an armed private security contractor at a federal facility was allowed to share an elevator with President Obama during a site visit, in violation of USSS security protocols. The following day, October 1, 2014, USSS Director Julia Pierson resigned. Former USSS Director Pierson has been replaced by Joseph P. Clancy, who is the Service’s Acting Director until President Obama selects a permanent USSS Director. It should also be noted that USSS Deputy Director A.T. Smith resigned on February 9, 2015.

These security breaches and an apparently unwitting operator’s breach of the White House grounds on January 26, 2015, by a recreational drone—that crashed on the lawn of the White House—followed a series of confirmed and alleged incidents of misconduct by USSS agents. The House Appropriations Committee stated in the report accompanying the FY2015 DHS appropriations bill that it was “deeply disappointed by recurring allegations of misconduct within the Secret Service.” The Committee withheld \$20 million from its recommendation for the USSS management budget until it submit a report providing evidence that the USSS has addressed these confirmed and alleged incidents of misconduct.

FY2014 and FY2015 Estimated Obligations for USSS Protection Mission Activities

In FY2014, the USSS estimates that it will have obligated the following amounts for protective mission activities:

- Protection of Persons and Facilities—\$860 million;
- Protective Intelligence Activities—\$67 million;
- National Special Security Events—\$ 9 million; and
- Total Protection—\$936 million.

In FY2015, the USSS estimates it will obligate the following amounts for protective mission activities:

- Protection of Persons and Facilities—\$870 million;
- Protective Intelligence Activities—\$68 million;
- National Special Security Events—\$5 million;
- Presidential Candidate Nominee Protection—\$26 million; and
- Total Protection—\$969 million.

Shawn Reese, Analyst in Emergency Management and Homeland Security Policy

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