

The Naval Criminal Investigative Service: The Department of the Navy's Felony Investigative and Counterintelligence Arm

The Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) is the federal law enforcement agency charged with conducting investigations of felony-level offenses affecting the Navy and Marine Corps – that is, crimes punishable by confinement for more than one year. NCIS also performs investigations and operations aimed at identifying and neutralizing foreign intelligence, international terrorist, and cyber threats to the Department of the Navy. In addition, it provides warning of threats and specialized defensive force protection support to U.S. naval forces around the world.

NCIS is comprised of some 2,500 personnel in over 40 countries around the globe. The organization is roughly 90% civilian, and its cadre of federal agents – about half its total personnel – is 98% civilian.

Criminal investigation is at the foundation of virtually all the organization does, but the NCIS mission is broad. Transnational terrorism has been and remains a key focus area for the agency. The al Qaeda threat made clear to NCIS that merely reacting to crime – the traditional law enforcement model – was no longer adequate. After the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen in 2000 and the events of 9/11, NCIS adopted a proactive model of law enforcement and a new strategy for engaging the threat. Today, NCIS' mantra is: "Prevent Terrorism, Protect Secrets, and Reduce Crime."

In particular, NCIS has increased its overseas presence and capacity to meet the "expeditionary" requirements of America's naval services. With U.S. naval units increasing operations in many parts of the world – consider the Marine Corps' involvement in Southwest Asia and the Navy's expansion of operations off the coasts of Africa and Central and South America – NCIS has boosted its forward presence, too, to better support force protection requirements. NCIS also conducts seminars and exercises in foreign nations to help law enforcement and security counterparts enhance their capabilities to support visits by U.S. naval units and promote maritime security.

NCIS has been recognized for its ability to adapt its core competencies in areas like interrogation, evidence collection, undercover work, forensics, and more to a multitude of environments. Naval commanders combating insurgent movements in Southwest Asia, as well as those in the Horn of Africa, where the Navy's large forward presence helps stabilize the region, increasingly seek NCIS "downrange" support for just this reason. These commanders recognize that the tools routinely used by law enforcement have immense value in countering the "irregular challenges" posed by terrorism, insurgencies, piracy, and other threats. Since 2002, hundreds of NCIS personnel have made extended deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere – all on a voluntary basis – in support of overseas military operations.

In Iraq, for instance, NCIS established a fingerprint lab in Fallujah to help identify insurgent operatives. Evidence collected after safe house raids, sniper incidents, and

bombings were processed forensically. NCIS personnel operating with Marines at the Joint Prosecution and Exploitation Center utilized this and other evidence to identify and arrest hundreds of insurgents and build cases for their prosecution in Iraqi courts.

Moreover, NCIS contributes to Defense Department counterintelligence units in combat zones, where the focus is on hostile intelligence threats to U.S. interests there. NCIS also provides cyber investigative support to these units, conducting computer forensics to aid criminal prosecutions and develop intelligence on insurgent and terrorist threats. The agency also provides specialized polygraph support to these units.

Beyond its involvement in these areas, NCIS has also become engaged in supporting the Navy's counter-piracy strategies. NCIS agents process piracy crime scenes, collect evidence, conduct witness interviews, and testify in court proceedings – even in foreign courts.

The expanded support that NCIS has provided to naval expeditionary forces has not diminished the agency's focus on its bread-and-butter mission, criminal investigation. The agency has applied its proactive approach to basic crimefighting, as well. NCIS' Crime Reduction Program (CRP) aims to reduce the criminal threat to Sailors, Marines, and their families. Domestic violence, identity theft, sexual assault, workplace violence, gang activity, and other threats are highlighted on a quarterly basis. By heightening awareness of warning signs and offering tips on safe practices, the CRP has helped reduce crime affecting naval personnel and their dependents.

Finally, the NCIS Multiple Threat Alert Center (MTAC) acts as a fusion center and operations hub for the agency. A primary task is providing timely warning of criminal, terrorist, and foreign intelligence threats to U.S. naval forces around the world.

In today's increasingly interconnected, technologically advanced world, the threat landscape evolves continuously. NCIS stands ready to apply its broad array of competencies and capabilities as new challenges appear on the horizon. Adaptable, flexible, expeditionary...that's today's NCIS.