Safety through immigration control

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"Oh God, you who open all doors, please open all doors for me, open all venues for me, open all avenues for me." (Prayer found in Mohammed Atta's luggage)

Supporters of high immigration have tried to de-link immigration control from security. A week after the hijackings, the head of the immigration lawyers' association said, "I don't think [9/11] can be attributed to the failure of our immigration laws." Even the 9/11 Commission, which held hearings in January on the immigration failures that contributed to the attacks, is devoting inordinate attention, as we saw recently, to peripheral issues like who sent what memo to whom.

While ordinary people don't need hearings to know there's a link between immigration and security, a fuller understanding of the issue is necessary if we are to fix what needs to be fixed and reduce the likelihood of future attacks.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz said in October 2002, "Fifty years ago, when we said 'home front,' we were referring to citizens back home doing their part to support the war front. Since last September, however, the home front has become a battlefront every bit as real as any we've known before."

The reality of the Home Front isn't confined to the threat posed by Islamic terrorism. No enemy, whatever his ideology, has any hope of defeating America's armies in the field and must therefore resort to what scholars call "asymmetric" or "fourth-generation" warfare – terrorism and related tactics, which we saw before 9/11 in the Middle East and East Africa and which we are seeing today in Iraq. But the brass ring of such a strategy is mass killings of civilians on American soil.

Our objective on the Home Front is different from that faced by the military because the goal is defensive, blocking and disrupting the enemy's ability to carry out attacks on our territory. This will then allow offensive forces, if needed, to find, pin and kill the enemy overseas.

So the burden of homeland defense is not borne by our armed forces but by

agencies formerly seen as civilian entities – mainly the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). And of DHS 's many responsibilities, immigration control is central. The reason is elementary: No matter the weapon or delivery system – hijacked airliners, shipping containers, suitcase nukes, anthrax spores – terrorists are needed to carry out the attacks, and those terrorists have to enter and operate in the United States. In a very real sense, the primary weapons of our enemies are not the inanimate objects at all, but rather the terrorists themselves, especially in the case of suicide attackers.

Thus keeping the terrorists out or apprehending them after they get in is indispensable to victory. In the words of the administration's July 2002 *National Strategy for Homeland Security:*

Our great power leaves these enemies with few conventional options for doing us harm. One such option is to take advantage of our freedom and openness by secretly inserting terrorists into our country to attack our homeland. Homeland security seeks to deny this avenue of attack to our enemies and thus to provide a secure foundation for America's ongoing global engagement.

Our enemies have repeatedly exercised this option of inserting terrorists by exploiting weaknesses in our immigration system. A Center for Immigration Studies analysis found that nearly every element of the immigration system has been penetrated by the enemy. Of the 48 al Qaeda operatives who committed terrorist acts here since 1993 (including the 9/11 hijackers), one-third were here on various temporary visas, another third were legal residents or naturalized citizens, one-fourth were illegal aliens, and the remainder had pending asylum applications. Nearly half of the total had, at some point or another, violated immigration laws.

An immigration system designed for homeland security, therefore, needs to apply to all stages in the process – issuing visas overseas, screening people at the borders and airports, and enforcing the rules inside the country. Nor can we focus all our efforts on Middle Easterners and ignore people from elsewhere. That may make sense in the short term – as triage, if you will – but in the longer term we need comprehensive improvements, because al Qaeda is adapting. The FBI has warned local law enforcement that al-Qaeda is already exploring the use of Chechenterrorists, people with Russian passports who won't draw our attention if we're focusing only on Saudis and Egyptians.

None of this is to say that there are no other weapons against domestic terrorist attacks – we certainly need more effective international coordination, improved intelligence gathering and distribution, special military operations. But in the end, the lack of effective immigration control leaves us naked in the face of the enemy.