

# How Did the Terrorists Get In?

by Mark Krikorian  
and Steve Camarota

**A**s we consider our response to September 11's horrific attacks, we must be careful not to seek scapegoats among foreigners who live among us. But if immigrants in general aren't the problem, a broken immigration system almost certainly is partly to blame.

While much attention has been focused on the failure of intelligence and airport security, it is also clear that we have failed to properly police our borders — borders being any place where foreign citizens enter the United States. It would be a grave error if we did not ask ourselves the fundamental question: How did these terrorists get in?

Despite all the cant about globalization, borders are not irrelevant in today's world, nor are they unenforceable. In fact, the need to secure them is more

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pressing than ever, given ease of travel coupled with very real terrorist threats.

Most Americans understand that our border is not an obstacle to be overcome by travelers and businesses but instead is a critical tool for protecting America's national interests. Unfortunately, much of America's elite doesn't get it.

Most notorious among the cheerleaders for open borders have been libertarians such as the Cato Institute. *The Wall Street Journal* has frequently called for a five-word amendment to the Constitution: "There shall be open borders."

Even minimal efforts to strengthen border controls have often been stymied. Congress in 1996 directed the Immigration and Naturalization Service to record arrivals and departures of foreigners at border crossings so as to identify people overstaying visas. Business interests prompted Congress to postpone this requirement several times and ultimately to eliminate it. If we take the physical safety of our people seriously, we cannot continue to allow libertarian ideologues, immigration lawyers, cheap-labor business interests, and ethnic pressure groups to hobble our ability to manage our borders. What, then, is to be done?

- The Border Patrol, despite

recent increases, remains almost laughably inadequate — at any given time, there are only about 1,700 agents patrolling the southern border, an average of less than one agent per mile, and the northern border is even less defended.

- Establishing a computerized system to track entries and exits from the United States should not even be a subject of debate. There are no technological obstacles, merely a lack of will and funding. What's more, the practice of requiring permanent residents who are not yet citizens to annually register their whereabouts with the government, which was discontinued in the 1970s, should be revived.

- The State Department's visa officers overseas need to be recognized as "America's other border patrol." Visa officers often have only two or three minutes to consider an application, and are pressured to approve a high proportion of applicants to avoid offending the host country. The granting of visas should become a free-standing, well-funded function that people sign up for from the start, rather than today's dreaded rite of passage for rookie Foreign Service officers.

- The very morning of the September 11 attack, the House was about to resurrect a provision called 245(i), which allows illegal aliens to receive green cards from

within the United States, rather than in their home countries. Because personnel abroad are best equipped to screen applicants, 245(i) negates any efforts to keep out those judged to be ineligible.

- Finally, whatever one thinks about the level of immigration, a temporary reduction in legal immigration as well as in the admission of temporary workers and students is essential to allow the overhaul of our immigration infrastructure. Only by lightening the INS' load can the agency both process its huge backlog and strengthen border controls.

Improved border and visa

control may not catch all malefactors, but it would help alert us to conspiracies such as the September 11 attacks. If only a few of the dozens of conspirators had been identified by consular officers during visa processing or by border inspectors, it is very possible that the entire conspiracy would have unraveled.

We have, of course, seen home-grown terrorists as well, but that is no reason to neglect border control. We should not overreact by eviscerating constitutional rights, including those of Muslim Americans, but an overhaul of our lax border controls is precisely the

kind of reasonable reform that would make future attacks less likely and does not represent any threat to the civil liberties of American citizens. Americans are going to have to wait in longer lines at airports — it is not too much to ask people entering the country to do the same. Moreover, more foreign citizens may be denied visas. The measure of a successful immigration system is not how many people are allowed to enter or how fast, but rather whether the broad national interests of the United States are being served, including the safety of Americans.

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