

Homeland Security

Managing Homeland Security Developing a Threat-Based Strategy

Background

“Homeland security”—both the term and the policy—were effectively born amid the crisis of September 11, 2001. The policy started with a simple purpose: to prevent further terrorist attacks on American soil. There have been no attacks in the United States for over five years, so homeland security policy appears to have been successful. But it is such a new policy that understanding the reasons for that success is difficult, particularly because homeland security has become such a politically charged question.

In the early days after 9/11, it made sense to take measures that responded to the circumstances of that attack and reassured a nervous public. But more than five years into the apparently endless war on terrorism, homeland security should evolve from a set of emergency policies into a permanent field of important government policy that, like any other, must justify its allocation of taxpayer funds through solid analysis.

Recommendations

The new President should put forward a threat-based homeland security strategy that would acknowledge that major terrorist attacks are unlikely in the United States and would reallocate resources accordingly. The strategy would focus specifically on enhancing four major efforts:

- cooperation with foreign partners to degrade Al Qa’eda further
- continued “over-protection” of civil aviation, including air cargo inspection and defense against surface-to-air missiles
- public education to create more resilience in the event of an attack
- outreach to Muslim communities in the United States, whose unfriendliness to terrorist groups has made the United States less vulnerable than other countries to terror attacks

Key Facts

- the federal government alone will spend over \$58 billion on homeland security in fiscal year 2007—spending by state and local governments and the private sector is probably many times that figure
- no one has presented any evidence of any group in the world currently willing and able to carry out a terrorist attack in the United States using nuclear weapons, yet the U.S. government spends over \$9 billion a year to defend against “catastrophic threats”
- no one has presented any evidence of a realistic plot against a port in the United States, yet the U.S. government is increasing port security by more than \$2 billion in fiscal year 2007
- an FBI report in 2005 concluded that there were no Al Qa’eda cells or affiliated organizations in the United States
- FBI attention to counterterrorism has reduced the FBI’s criminal cases by half and its drug-related investigations by 70 percent
- most Islamic charitable activity in the United States have been shut down since 9/11 on suspicion that the charities fund terrorism

A full version of this proposal, as well as supporting background material, is available at www.opportunity08.org.

About the Author and the Project

Jeremy Shapiro

Jeremy Shapiro is director of research at the Center on the United States and Europe at Brookings. His expertise includes military operations, national security and transatlantic diplomacy. Shapiro is also an adjunct professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University.

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