

Book Guide

The Closing of the American Border

In this book, CFR Senior Fellow Edward Alden examines the complicated interplay between the United States' need for homeland security and economic openness in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Teaching notes by the author.

Summary

The Closing of the American Border: Terrorism, Immigration, and Security Since 9/11 tells the story of the Bush administration's efforts to balance security and openness in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Based on extensive interviews with U.S. government officials, as well as business executives, foreign government officials, university professionals, and individuals, this book goes behind the scenes of the internal struggles over policymaking, and examines the real world impacts of those policy decisions. The result is a compelling assessment of the price the United States has paid for making it increasingly difficult for others to travel, live, and work within its borders. This book offers value on two different levels: as a case study in the development of policy and the workings of American bureaucracy, and as an analysis of American border security policy, past, present, and future.

The book concludes that, while there can be no doubt that American border policy prior to 9/11 was at times lax to a point of being naïve, changes immediately after the attacks largely did more harm than good. It examines the complicated interplay between the United States' need for homeland security, economic openness, and the social and diplomatic benefits of maintaining a welcoming society. Finally, it recommends a greater focus on the development of smart border security measures that work as hard to invite in good people as they do to keep out bad ones.

This book, along with the teaching notes, discussion questions, and suggestions for further projects, are ideal for courses on U.S. foreign policy and international affairs; U.S. government and the development and execution of U.S. policy; U.S. border, visa, and immigration policy; the effects of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks; and civil liberties and immigrant and refugee rights.

Discussion and Essay Questions

Courses on U.S. Foreign Policy and International Affairs

1. What are some examples of places where American domestic policy and politics have a powerful effect on international relations?
2. Are American border policies principally a foreign or domestic issue? Where are places where these interests compete?
3. Which constituencies, foreign and domestic, have a stake in the balancing act between the homeland security and border policies discussed in this book? How should U.S. policy take into account the wide variety of interests at play?
4. In what ways did the policy changes discussed throughout this book affect the United States' global relationships and standing?

Courses on U.S. Government and the Development and Execution of U.S. Policy

1. In what ways did competition between and within bureaucracies affect the development of border policies after 9/11?
2. Which actors best managed the politics, internal and external, to achieve the results they wanted from these policy changes?

3. Overall, were the policy changes after 9/11 subjected to appropriate checks and balances? Where was a policy checked by an institutional balance? Where did it seem as though the necessary balances were lacking?
4. What lessons do the problems in the start-up of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) teach us about the difficulties of government organizations?

Courses on U.S. Border, Visa, and Immigration Policy

1. What are some of the ways in which U.S. immigration policy has been linked to American antiterrorism objectives? Are these linkages appropriate?
2. How has the creation of DHS and the reorganization of the U.S. departments that deal with border policy altered the United States' approach to these issues?
3. What are some of the ways that visa and immigration policies affect the United States' global standing? Its economy?
4. What are some of the important issues facing border officials today? Based on the policy processes seen in this book, map out a strategy for developing and enacting a policy to confront one of these challenges.

Courses on the Effects of the September 11, 2001 Terrorist Attacks

1. Has the U.S. government been more successful in finding the necessary balance between security and openness as time has passed since the 9/11 attacks?
2. Did the events discussed in this book reveal any problems with the U.S. government's capabilities to react to emergency situations, or the checks in balances in place?
3. What security vulnerabilities were revealed by, and in the wake of, the 9/11 attacks? Have these been sufficiently addressed since?
4. Given that terrorism depends as much on the damage done by the reaction to the attacks as the attacks themselves, how would you rate the American response to the 9/11 attacks? What are three ways in which the response could have been better executed?

Courses on Civil Liberties and Immigrant and Refugee Rights

1. What are some of the differences in protections for U.S. citizens, as compared to immigrants, within American borders? Are these differences appropriate?
2. Has the development of the Department of Homeland Security been a net boon or net loss for American civil liberties? Why?
3. What are the major changes in immigrant and refugee rights detailed in this book? What are some of the benefits and consequences of these changes?
4. What are some examples of when checks and balances to protect citizen and immigrant civil rights did and did not operate properly in post-9/11 policymaking?

Supplementary Materials

Alden, Edward, "Closed-Minded on the Border," *Washington Post*, November 23, 2008.

Muller, Benjamin J., *Governing Through Risk at the Canadian/US Border: Liberty, Security, and Technology*, Border Policy Research Institute Working Paper, September 2008.

Secure Borders and Open Doors: Preserving Our Welcome to the World in an Age of Terrorism, Report of the Secure Borders Open Doors Advisory Committee, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, January 2008.

Kerwin, Donald and Margaret D. Stock, *National Security and Immigration Policy: Reclaiming Terms, Measuring Success, and Setting Priorities*, U.S. Military Academy, July 2007.

O'Hanlon, Michael, "Border Protection," Testimony before Congress, June 28, 2006.

Yale-Loehr, Stephen, Demetrios G. Papademetriou, and Betsy Cooper, *Secure Border, Open Doors: Visa Procedures in the Post-9/11 Era*, Migration Policy Institute Report, September 2005.

Leiken, Robert S., *Bearers of Global Jihad? Immigration and National Security After 9/11*, Nixon Center Report, 2004.

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