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# POROUS BORDERS & CULTIVATED THREATS

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RICHARD SCHOEBERL

As the United States embarks on the 2016 presidential campaign, the great debate on immigration and border security continues to be a blistering topic. However, controlling the borders is far more than just immigration control, it is about providing national security and protecting the American people from the threats that loom on the horizon.

According to a [study conducted at Princeton University](http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu/results/results-en.aspx) (<http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu/results/results-en.aspx>) in 2015, the United States has only been able to stop roughly 30 percent of those attempting to cross the Southwest border. Failing to secure the border is certainly not for a lack of trying; since 9/11, the number of Border Patrol agents has risen

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from 3,000 to nearly 21,000 (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2011-06-16/are-us-borders-secure>). Additionally, the United States has added countless drones, mass surveillance systems, and 700 miles of fencing. But it may not be enough.

In an area that stretches from California to Texas – encompassing more than 2,000 miles – the border between the United States and Mexico remains porous and unsecure. Although no specific threat is addressed, according to a bulletin (<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/08/29/online-posts-show-isis-eyeing-mexican-border-says-law-enforcement-bulletin.html>) issued in 2014 by the Texas Department of Public Safety, Islamic State militants have raised awareness among its followers that entry into the United States through the Southwest border is a viable option. The bulletin addresses social media posts that call on Islamic State supporters to enter the United States via Mexico, which raises numerous concerns.

## ***GOVERNMENT REPORTS OF THE LONG-TERM THREAT***

Recent information that the Islamic State has accessed the United States through the Mexican border has not yet been confirmed. However, a report dating back to 2006 by the House Committee on Homeland Security

([http://media.cygnus.com/files/base/OFCR/document/2012/01/borderthreat\\_10619200.pdf](http://media.cygnus.com/files/base/OFCR/document/2012/01/borderthreat_10619200.pdf)) indicates that, each year, hundreds of individuals from countries that are “known to harbor terrorists” or “promote terrorism” routinely cross the Southwest border. The report also substantiates that, sometime before 2005, members of the terrorist group Hezbollah had crossed into the United States.

In a 2009 Government Accountability Office report (<http://gao.gov/assets/300/294548.pdf>), Border Patrol agents encountered at least three people with links to terrorist organizations at border checkpoints that year. Moreover, the House Committee on Homeland Security released an additional report (<https://homeland.house.gov/files/11-15-12-Line-in-the-Sand.pdf>) in November 2012 that indicates nearly 2,000 people identified as “special interest” with ties to countries that “could bring harm” were apprehended at the Southwest border.

Before the House Oversight Committee’s National Security subcommittee, U.S. Representative Ron DeSantis stated in March 2016 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m\\_cOvjYlb0w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_cOvjYlb0w)) that, “The U.S. Customs and Border protection has apprehended several members of known Islamic terrorist organizations crossing the border in recent years.” In the wake of deadly attacks in 2016 in several European countries, the potential for Middle Eastern immigrants with terrorist organization ties gaining access to the United States through the Southwest border raises alarms.

## ***NO SLOWING OF THE THREAT***

In 2015, utilizing stolen Greek passports, eight Syrian refugees were detained at the border attempting to cross from Mexico into Texas. According to the Washington Times (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/dec/30/pakistanis-terrorist-connections-nabbed-us-border/?page=all>), in September 2015, the U.S. Border Patrol apprehended two Pakistani males, who had links to a terrorist organization, as they attempted to cross the border. Most concerning is that, in a 2014 Federal Bureau of Investigation effort, five men from a Somalian-based community in Minnesota plotted to join the Islamic State and were charged in a criminal indictment (<https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>) with

conspiracy to provide material support to terrorism. One of those charged, Guled Ali Omar, communicated to Islamic State members a route that could be used to get Islamic State terrorists into the United States to carry out attacks through the Southwest border.

Government officials continue to affirm the vulnerability of the Southwest border. In fact, in 2007, [Mike McConnell](https://www.eff.org/files/filenode/att/elpasotimesmccconnelltranscript.pdf) (<https://www.eff.org/files/filenode/att/elpasotimesmccconnelltranscript.pdf>), former director of national intelligence, confirmed that terrorists have used this border to access the United States and that they will continue to do so as long as it is seen as a viable possibility. At a [hearing before the House Homeland Security Committee in 2012](https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112hhr80849/pdf/CHRG-112hhr80849.pdf) (<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112hhr80849/pdf/CHRG-112hhr80849.pdf>), U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano confirmed that there was credible evidence that terrorists had already crossed this border. Since the United States is dealing with sophisticated terrorist organizations like the Islamic State, Hezbollah, and al-Qaida, the Southwest border has become the greatest threat for infiltration into the United States because these organizations continue to seek alternate and innovative methods to gain access to the United States and increase their chances at a successful operation.

## ***HUMAN TRAFFICKING***

Another fear to national security and border control is terrorist organizations gaining access to the United States through the exploitation of human trafficking networks. According to the United Nations, human trafficking is the fastest growing area in the international criminal activity arena. In a [Congressional Research Service report](https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34317.pdf) (<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34317.pdf>), approximately 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year, with approximately 14,500 to 17,500 trafficked into the United States. Trafficking networks are engaged in an endless quest to create innovative methods to get people smuggled across the U.S. Southwest border. For example, over the past 5 years, there have been over [150 elaborate tunnels](https://www.dhs.gov/news/2011/06/15/testimony-executive-associate-director-james-dinkins-immigration-and-customs) (<https://www.dhs.gov/news/2011/06/15/testimony-executive-associate-director-james-dinkins-immigration-and-customs>) discovered at the Southwest border.

In an effort to address the ongoing border threat, the Southwest Border Security Threat Assessment Act of 2016 ([H.R. 4482](https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/4482) (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/4482>)) was introduced on February 2016 and passed by the House in April 2016. H.R. 4482 requires and directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to conduct Southwest border analysis that focuses on several areas of deficiency, including the following:

- Terrorism and criminal threats posed by individuals seeking to unlawfully enter the United States
- Shortcomings and added improvements needed at ports of entry to prevent possible terrorists from entering
- Coordination efforts between state, federal, and local law enforcement that may hinder effective security, anti-terrorism strategies, and anti-human trafficking networks
- Further examination of technology and infrastructure needs and challenges
- Intelligence collection to disrupt transnational criminal organizations

Spanning terrorist organizations attempting to acquire weapons of mass destruction, drug cartels, and human traffickers, the United States confronts a wide assortment of threats daily at its borders. One factor the United States must consider is that terrorist organizations are changing the way they operate and are looking to exploit vulnerabilities. The question is, "How can we effectively secure 2,000 miles of the Southwest border?" As long as there are opportunities and fortunes to be made, drug and human smugglers will use elaborate means to penetrate the border. The United States already has a difficult time "containing" illegal drug smuggling and human trafficking – imagine someone attempting to gain access to the United States who is motivated by aneology rather than just money.

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*Richard Schoeberl, Ph.D., has over 25 years of experience, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). He served in various positions throughout his career, ranging from a supervisory special agent at the FBI's headquarters in Washington, D.C., to acting unit chief of the International Terrorism Operations Section at the NCTC. In addition to the FBI and NCTC, he is an author of numerous articles on terrorism and security and has served as a media contributor for Fox News, CNN, PBS, NPR, Al-Jazeera Television, Al Arabiva Television, and Al Hurra. He works with the international nonprofit organization Hope for Justice, combatting human trafficking, and additionally serves as a professor of Homeland Security at The University of Tennessee Southern. He also is an advisor to the Domestic Preparedness Journal.*

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