



Federal immigration failures undermine our safety

Matt A. Mayer

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In a weekend New York Times article, “[US Doesn’t Know How Many Foreign Visitors Overstay Visas](http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/01/02/us/politics/us-doesnt-know-how-many-foreign-visitors-overstay-visas.html?referer=http://www.drudgereport.com/) (<http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/01/02/us/politics/us-doesnt-know-how-many-foreign-visitors-overstay-visas.html?referer=http://www.drudgereport.com/>),” readers learned what many of us have known for years: roughly half of the illegal immigrants in America are people who came here legally, but decided not to leave once their visas expired.

When it comes to the general issue of immigration, visa overstayers are a frustrating problem. When it comes, however, to terrorists trained by Daesh, visa overstayers can be deadly. As I highlighted in [a recent Wall Street Journal op-ed](https://www.aei.org/publication/its-too-easy-for-terrorists/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/its-too-easy-for-terrorists/>), America already faces a threat from terrorists using the Visa Waiver Program to enter America. That threat becomes more severe if once we identify a terrorist who entered the US, we can’t find him or even determine if he left after his visa expired.



http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/RTX1X43D_sanbernardino-e1451924559637.jpg

Ammunition confiscated from the attack in San Bernardino, California. REUTERS/San Bernardino County Sheriffs Department.

Keep in mind we know there was a bomb maker in Paris who made the suicide vests used by the attackers. That bomb maker remains at large. If he is someone free from known terrorist ties, he won't generate a hit should he decide to come to America under the VWP. Once here, our failed immigration system will allow him to remain here as long as he'd like, stay where he can teach others how to make bombs, set up a production safe house, and provide attackers with the tools they need to kill and maim Americans.

This failure must be corrected immediately lest we issue empty regrets and apologies after an attack.

More broadly, if we are ever to have an immigration system that works, we must have an exit system that ensures those who come here legally leave when their visas expire. Otherwise, all of our efforts on the southern border to limit those who come here illegally will be for naught, as we still will have several millions visa overstayers among us. The US Department of Homeland Security was supposed to develop an exit system years ago. Admittedly, creating such a system is harder than you'd think given the multiple entry/exit points, the resources available to enforce such a program, and other technical hurdles. Nonetheless, the federal government must do better than total failure in its core job of protecting our sovereignty.

Congress must stop giving lip service to DHS failures to do its job. Congress has the ultimate check with its power of the purse. It needs to use it.

This article was found online at:

<http://www.aei.org/publication/federal-immigration-failures-undermine-our-safety/>