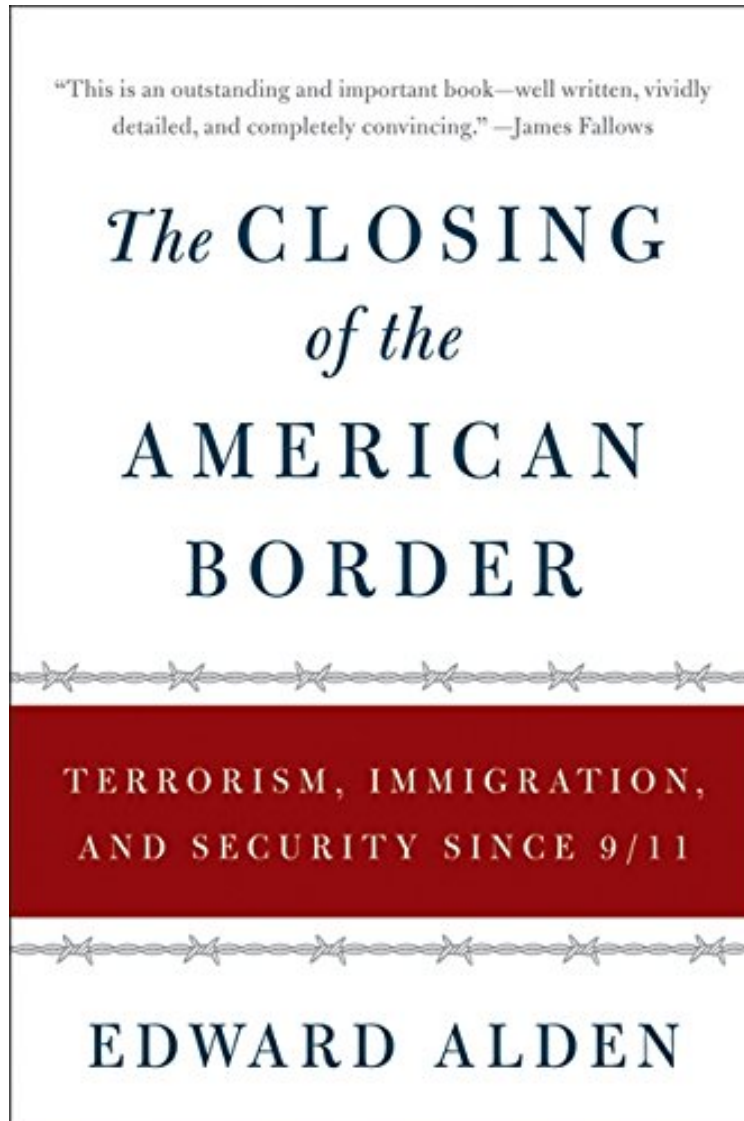


The Closing of the American Border: Terrorism, Immigration, and Security Since 9/11

Edward Alden

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Edward Alden : The Closing of the American Border: Terrorism, Immigration, and Security Since 9/11 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Closing of the American Border: Terrorism, Immigration, and Security Since 9/11:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Outstanding and Overlooked Must-Read on Homeland SecurityBy

Jonathan Zasloff

The Closing of the American Border is a superb book with an atrocious sense of timing: it appeared almost simultaneously with Jane Mayer's "The Dark Side" and Barton Gellman's "Angler" and got lost in the shuffle (both of those books are excellent as well). That's a terrible shame, because Closing of the American Border is really a must-read if you are interested in homeland security issues. Alden posits a split in thinking about homeland security between the "technocrats," who wanted to use precisely-tailored measures based upon technology to control the border and emphasized intelligence gathering, and the "cops," who took a traditional law enforcement approach and particularly relied upon immigration enforcement, because they did not have to worry about constitutional due process and other Bill of Rights limitations. (According to rightfully-maligned Supreme Court precedent, Congress has "plenary power" over immigration, which means that the Constitution often just does not apply. The Court's recent decision in Boumediene might signal a change in that approach, although I wouldn't hold my breath.) Alden's book is so good in no small part because he shows how neither approach is perfect: technology just can't do what we want it to do, and what its promoters (often the contractors who make it) claim it will do. But the costs of a pure law enforcement approach are even worse: there is precious little evidence that rounding up thousands of immigrant men of Middle Eastern background actually get us much intelligence or prevent crimes. Instead, they undermine intelligence by destroying the government's credibility in immigrant communities and are fabulously expensive. And there are two other terrible problems with the cops' approach: 1) It keeps people out whom we want and need to let in. Put another way, the law enforcement approach doesn't consider the costs of tightening the border: theoretically it could consider these costs, but its adherents are used to chasing bad guys, not thinking about broader policy goals. Alden begins his book with the tale of a world-class pediatric cardiology surgeon, who is from Pakistan, and couldn't get into the country for years because, well, he's from Pakistan. How many children's lives were lost because of this? America is in danger of losing its scientific and technical edge because we keep out thousands of talented students, who normally might have stayed in the US and helped build American companies. And US companies start moving production overseas, because they can't interact with foreigners for meetings and projects, because they can't get into the country. 2) The law enforcement approach likes the immigration power because it frees it from legal shackles. But the more that DHS guards the border through immigration enforcement, the more its mission begins to morph from a security agency to an immigration enforcement agency. Indeed, this is probably a major reason why Obama tapped Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano to be DHS Secretary: she's a border state governor with a tough reputation for cracking down on illegals, and Obama doesn't want to get into a cultural struggle on that issue (at least not now). This might be a wise political judgment, but it might have the unintended effect of distorting what DHS should be and needs to be. If I have a choice between hiring Border Patrol guards and hiring intelligence operatives to disrupt Al-Qaeda and Hizbullah, there's no question we need to choose the latter. But an immigration-focused DHS might push for the former. Is anyone listening? I hope so, but fear not. Fortunately enough, you can. One extra plus of Closing is that it is unabridged on audio, with Robertson Dean giving a typically excellent reading. It's not a feel-good story on your commute, but Alden's thoughtful and balanced book is hardly alarmist. It's just necessary.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Extremely readable

By Missy Attridge

I bought this book because I was impressed with an editorial Ted Alden wrote in the Washington Post. The book explains the post 9/11 immigration challenges in a way non-experts can understand. Some of our well intentioned policies have had an unintended negative impact that I was unaware of.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. required reading

By Scott G. Borgerson

Edward Alden's timely new book, The Closing of the American Border, is a must read for the incoming Obama administration and any American interested in homeland security (as well as foreigners wanting to better understand often contradictory US immigration policies). Exhaustively researched and brilliantly penned, this page-turner provides a thorough account of the country's border policies since 9/11. This important book is the unofficial history of how overnight border security transitioned from an almost afterthought to a bureaucratic tug of war, sometimes carried out in the oval office, between "the cops" and "the technocrats" struggling to balance protecting the country with civil liberties in a new age of counter-terrorism. Unlike many serious policy books, The Closing of the American Border is actually a terrific read, written with a combination of serious analysis and gut wrenching anecdotes of detained immigrants whose only crime was their place of birth, unlucky timing, and desire to invest their considerable talents in the United States. The book tells harrowing stories of lives destroyed after being snared in blunt security initiatives aimed at foiling the next major attack. Admittedly, while it is impossible to prove a counterfactual why there hasn't been another terrorist incident, the book details how the closing of the American border has come with considerable cost to America's image abroad and economic competitiveness at home. Immigrants, whose sweat literally and figuratively built America, have run up against an administrative buzz saw from a government still reeling from Al Qaeda's surprise attack. As the book chronicles, Bush administration officials in a politically charged and risk adverse environment have been at almost every corner willing to sacrifice efficiency and open borders for tighter, if imperfect, border security. The personal stories of individual disaster the book relays put human faces on what often just seem like steely, impersonal policy decisions. The book reads like a combination of the Warren Report and a reality TV series turned horror show. New DHS officials, incoming National Security Council staff, and citizens interested in the perennial tensions between freedom and security should carefully read The Closing of the American Border and keep it close to their desks. This

book provides critical strategic lessons gleaned from seven years of hindsight for Americans and their leaders. The policy choices remain difficult ones, and as this book makes clear, there is still much work to be done. Dr. Scott Borgerson, a former US Coast Guard officer, is the visiting fellow for ocean governance at the Council on Foreign Relations.

The Closing of the American Border is a provocative, behind-the-scenes investigation into the consequences of America's efforts to secure its borders since 9/11. Basing his conclusions on extensive interviews with former secretary of homeland security Tom Ridge, former secretary of state Colin Powell, other Bush administration officials, and many of the innocent people whose lives have been upended by the new border security and visa rules, Edward Alden offers a striking and compelling assessment of the dangers faced by a nation that cuts itself off from the rest of the world.

From Publishers Weekly: Former Washington bureau chief of the Financial Times, Alden provides a thoughtful and balanced assessment of border security and immigration policies before and after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, demonstrating how more stringent security can damage the U.S. economy by discouraging trade, tourism and an influx of bright minds and diligent workers. The author's vignettes make what could be a dry read engaging and urgent. Alden's policy prescriptions are book-ended with the story of Dr. Faiz Bhora, a leading heart surgeon from Pakistan who had trouble returning to the States to resume his work because of visa problems and was eventually caught in the post-9/11 Justice Department crackdown on visa applications by citizens of Muslim countries. Alden points out that the Department of Homeland Security concedes that most of its counterterrorism funds are being poured into securing and controlling the border with Mexico and makes a persuasive case that immigration enforcement and counterterrorism are two different things, and for either to be effective they need to be separated. (Sept.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. A thought-provoking study that will leave you looking at our borders in a new light. (The San Antonio Express-News) Alden's book reads like a case study in good intentions and bad effects. (The Wall Street Journal) In this revealing and richly researched account, Alden describes how the Bush administration came to rely on the blunt instrument of immigration enforcement to carry out its counterterrorism strategy after 9/11. (Julia Preston, Foreign Affairs) Compellingly argued and meticulously researched. (Clive Crook, The Financial Times) From the Publisher: "This is the book we've been waiting for--and which should be required reading at Homeland Security and in the Congress. `Seven years after 9/11,' Edward Alden writes, `it is much harder for a terrorist to enter the U.S. It is also much harder for everyone else.' America's greatness rests on the `tired and huddled masses,' which were among the world's most gifted and ambitious. Keep them out, and you'll keep out the country's most critical natural resource. Al-Qaida would like that, America should not." -- Josef Joffe, author of *Überpower* "Edward Alden's fascinating book tells the story, for the first time, of how the most open nation in the world began to close itself off. Evenhanded, fast-paced, and powerfully written, Alden's book is based on a tremendous amount of original research and reporting that goes inside the corridors of power in Washington and far beyond. The picture that emerges is deeply disturbing: zeal-driven confusion and overreach, repeated disregard for the U.S. Constitution, and thousands of innocent people arbitrarily detained or jailed. This important book should be read by policymakers and ordinary Americans alike." -- Amy Chua, Professor of Law at Yale Law School and author of *World on Fire* "Opportunity for all, openness, freedom--for the past century, those three values have been America's gift to the world. In this penetrating, impeccably researched, and devastating book, Edward Alden shows how America sacrificed each one after 9/11, in a bid for security that has yielded far less than it has cost. This is a superb case study of how the conduct of policy can drift depressingly far from the worthy intentions that gave rise to it." -- Edward Carr, *The Economist* "Illuminating. . . . Sensible, carefully constructed roundup of recent border security measures by the U.S. government, analyzing their degrees of success and failure. Alden examines how America went from the most open country in the world to a nation hostile and unwelcoming to foreigners. . . . The author brings home the sobering consequences of closing America's borders. . . . Alden's cogent analysis forces a closer look at these developments. A useful study that informs without grinding an ax." -- Kirkus "This is an outstanding and important book--well written, vividly detailed, and completely convincing. I've been waiting for the writer who would put together the full picture of what America did to itself in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks--how it changed from the country that attracted the world's talent to the country that detains, deports, and discourages talented foreigners who have no conceivable connection to any terrorist threat. Edward Alden now tells exactly that tale, and if enough people read it, it should change the way Americans talk and think about this issue." -- James Fallows, author of *Blind Into Baghdad*