Backgrounder

Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 1850
May 6, 2005

Building the Alliance for Freedom: An Agenda for Improving and Expanding the Visa Waiver Program

James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., and Richard Weitz, Ph.D.

The term "homeland security" is misleading. Virtually no homeland security program can be implemented effectively without the support and cooperation of America's friends and allies around the world. On the other hand, security is not about "pushing our borders out," making other nations bear the burden of protecting U.S. citizens. Homeland security is really a cooperative effort that enables nations to serve their mutual interests and protect their citizens—as well as the global economic lifelines that carry the free flow of goods, services, peoples, and ideas—against the threat of transnational terrorism.

Strengthening the international instruments that help to achieve this goal has to be a U.S. priority. One important tool is the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), which can be used to enhance security, protect individual liberties, advance civil society, promote economic growth, and build geostrategic partnerships. The United States should work with other states to improve this program and expand it to include increasingly important strategic nations, such as India, South Korea, and the new democracies in Eastern Europe.

The Visa Waiver Program

Under the Visa Waiver Program,[1] citizens from certain countries are permitted to enter the United States for tourism or business (but not for employment or formal study) for up to 90 days without a visa. Although these travelers are inspected at U.S. points of entry, they do not undergo the more rigorous back-

Talking Points

- The Visa Waiver Program permits citizens from certain countries to enter the United States for tourism or business for up to 90 days without a visa.
- By agreeing to common standards and policies, participating countries help to hinder travel by terrorists and transnational criminals.
- When all of the post-9/11 improvements in the Visa Waiver Program are in place and combined with more vigilant oversight, the VWP will significantly enhance security, trade, and travel.
- The United States should work with other states to improve and expand the VWP to include increasingly important strategic nations, such as India, South Korea, and the new democracies in Eastern Europe.
- Congress should require the Administration to establish a certification road map for selected partner nations with a goal of achieving full certification within five to 10 years.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/nationalsecurity/bg1850.cfm

Produced by the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002–4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.