

## ***When it comes to U.S. security, Canada is the weakest link***

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### **Body**

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Everyone makes New Year's resolutions, but what people should do instead this year is to tell elected officials that what we all need is for the government to finally get serious about securing our borders.

This doesn't mean keeping out legal immigrants, but it does require hermetically sealing the borders to illegals to prevent more terrorists from following the Christmas lead of the five Pakistani men who slipped across the Canadian border.

Since we can't achieve true border security overnight, government officials should start by fixing the things that are most broken. All 19 of the Sept. 11 terrorists came here on legal visas -- 15 of which were issued in one country, Saudi Arabia -- so the attention that has been paid to visas was warranted and is still necessary. The program formerly known as Visa Express -- where all Saudi residents were expected to submit visa applications to private Saudi travel agents -- was thankfully scrapped, but much work on the visa front remains.

Applicants in Saudi Arabia, for example, still get approved for visas at far higher rates than those from neighboring nations, even though we know the House of Saud has allowed us to reap the Islamic radicalism that it sows. But at least the public is now paying attention to visa policy. The same cannot be said, however, for illegal immigration.

Illegal immigration isn't just about jobs and economics anymore. It's about national security and terrorism. And in case people weren't able to piece together on their own the link between an open door and terrorists using that entryway, syndicated columnist Michelle Malkin made this connection the central thesis of her blockbuster new book, "Invasion." In it, she wrote of the security dangers posed by illegal immigration -- and the ease with which the five Pakistanis crossed into the United States proves the prescience of her warnings.

Our neighbor to the north has become the weakest link in our border security. Why? Because Canada is proudly the safe haven for all people, including thugs and terrorists. And terrorists don't even have to deny their terrorist ties to gain entry. Witness Mohammed Harkat, the 34-year-old pizza deliveryman in Ottawa who also happens to be buddies with Abu Zubaydah, the former operational leader of al-Qaida who is now in U.S. custody.

When Harkat, who was finally arrested last month, applied for asylum upon arriving in Canada in 1995, he claimed he was fleeing persecution from the Algerian government. He was granted refugee status in early 1997, and applied for permanent residence three weeks later. Harkat needed asylum because he was tied up with the Armed Islamic Group, which seeks to impose an Islamic dictatorship in Algeria "through the use of terrorist violence."

No wonder he was a marked man. But follow the logic: if someone wants to use "terrorist violence" to overthrow a sitting government for being too Western-influenced, then he is eligible for entry into our northern neighbor. Comforting thought when you consider that the Canadian border is practically unpatrolled.

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The Algerian Armed Islamic Group has been on the map for at least several years now, thanks to the efforts of Ahmed Ressam, also a refugee-seeker who was planning on blowing up Los Angeles International airport in time for the millennium celebrations. Luckily, an alert customs agent stopped Ressam at the border and discovered the trunk full of explosives. That was three years ago.

**Canada** has, in fairness, stepped up its intelligence gathering and has been working more closely with **U.S.** officials since Sept. 11, but it has actually gotten worse in terms of laying down the welcome mat. According to a recent report by the Center for Immigration Studies, **Canada** last year made it "easier for asylum-seekers to apply for refugee status and (made) it more difficult for those found not to be genuine refugees to be sent home" -- and that was two months after Sept. 11. In fact, almost 100 percent of asylum-seekers in **Canada** get a formal hearing with free legal advice, and being turned down does not necessarily result in getting kicked out.

Government officials need to act with a concerted resolve to stem the tide of terrorists streaming across our borders. Otherwise, it will be al-Qaida that gets its New Year's resolutions.

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