



**CENTER FOR HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND IMMIGRATION**

# *Center for Homeland Security and Immigration*

By: The Honorable Chad Wolf and John Zadrozny

The America First Policy Institute's (AFPI) Center for Homeland Security and Immigration is devoted to protecting the American people, American interests, and the American way of life. Our team's experience and efforts, both in and out of government service, have taught us that those who seek to injure Americans at home and abroad do not hesitate to target our freedoms and our institutions. Constant vigilance on the part of each and every American is required to prevent harm.

As our world becomes more complex, so do the threats we face. Terrorism remains a global reality, and America's ability to prevent attacks in the United States is only as strong as its weakest link at any given moment. America's enemies no longer need to physically come to our shores to hurt us in the digital age. Threats that strike at the heart of our infrastructure—and, therefore, our civilization—can be achieved with the touch of a button from anywhere in the world. In some cases, these threats are sponsored or shielded by foreign governments; in some cases, they *are* foreign governments. While these threats are omnipresent, courageous leadership at all levels of government and society is essential for success and security.



## WHERE IS AMERICA NOW

The Biden Administration's first few months have demonstrated how homeland security policies can either protect or endanger Americans—and how quickly—depending on the principles and realism undergirding them. The Biden Administration's approach to key aspects of homeland security has undermined national security, public safety, and public health and put our way of life at risk. The current administration's policies reflect a swift return to positions—favored by presidents and others in both major parties in the past—that have arguably failed.

### Putting America First

Beginning in 2017, the Trump Administration addressed these existential homeland security challenges through what can reasonably be described as an “America First” approach:

- It addressed our border security and immigration challenges by building hundreds of miles of new border wall along the United States-Mexico border (and assuring funding for even more) ([CBP, 2021](#)), providing Department of Homeland Security (DHS) personnel with the tools, resources, and support they needed to secure the border and enforce immigration law in the interior of the country ([AILA, 2017](#)),<sup>1</sup> protecting the unaccompanied alien children (UACs) who were trafficked to the United States ([Foley & Chapin, 2018](#) & [FR Doc. 2020-29182, 2021](#)), protecting American workers whose jobs and futures were threatened by cheap foreign labor ([Exec. Order No. 13788, 2017](#)),<sup>2</sup> reasserting sovereign control over our immigration policies ([CRS, 2020 & Wintour, 2017](#)), and fraud-proofing the naturalization process ([DOJ, 2020](#) & [Alvarez, 2020](#)).<sup>3</sup>
- It reversed an arguably lax approach to domestic terrorism by immediately banning the entry of insufficiently screened and vetted foreign nationals from high-threat countries ([Exec. Order No. 13780, 2017](#)), enhancing the screening and vetting of foreign nationals seeking to enter the United States at home and abroad ([Fox News, 2018](#), [Shear, 2017](#), & [Maurer, 2017](#)),<sup>4</sup> boosting cooperation with foreign governments to improve international security-focused cooperation ([Trump, 2017](#)),<sup>5</sup> shifting critical resources to assure thorough

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<sup>1</sup> In 2017, the House Appropriations Committee decided to meet the Trump Administration's requests for funding for border wall construction, additional Border Patrol agents, interior enforcement support, and 44,000-bed detention capacity.

<sup>2</sup> President Trump's Executive Order 13788, “Buy American and Hire American,” instructed key cabinet officials to update regulations and policies to “protect the interests of United States workers in the administration of our immigration system, including through the prevention of fraud or abuse.”

<sup>3</sup> The Department of Justice's creation of a Denaturalization Section within its Civil Division, which was a formalization of previous and less organized efforts, was intended to “bring justice to terrorists, war criminals, sex offenders, and other fraudsters who illegally obtained naturalization.” Use of denaturalization tools accompanied other efforts to strengthen the naturalization process, including, but not limited to, substantive updates to the civics examination.

<sup>4</sup> The National Vetting Center was established to enhance the screening and vetting of foreign nationals seeking entry into the United States. Its efforts dovetailed with the Trump Administration's Department of State's efforts to improve screening and vetting of foreign nationals seeking to enter the United States, including instructions to embassies and consulates to enhance their screening and vetting efforts of visa applicants.

<sup>5</sup> The Trump Administration created “minimum requirements for international cooperation to support visa and immigration vetting and adjudications for individuals seeking entry to the United States” and “a minimum-security baseline for entry into the United States.” While most countries met the new information-sharing standards as of September 2017, those that could not remained under greater scrutiny.



screening and vetting of asylum and refugee populations seeking to enter the United States ([Frazee, 2019](#)), and taking other steps to prevent transnational criminal and other organizations from infiltrating and conducting illicit business in the United States ([Houghton, 2017](#)).

- It reinforced critical domestic infrastructure by permanently dedicating DHS personnel and resources to infrastructure monitoring and protection ([Cimpanu, 2018](#)), launching several domestic working groups to improve infrastructure-related coordination with private industry ([CISA, 2020](#), [CISA, 2021](#), & [NIST](#)),<sup>6</sup> expanding international cooperation to identify and stay one step ahead of global threats to infrastructure ([Beavers, 2018](#)), using existing resources to harden some domestic infrastructure ([Chalfant & Miller, 2020](#), [DHS, 2019](#), & [DHS, 2020a](#)), and taking an infrastructure-based approach to protecting American health during the COVID-19 pandemic ([FEMA, 2020](#) & [DHS, 2020b](#)).<sup>7</sup>
- It curbed foreign influence in our institutions by developing a strategic plan to specifically counter the People's Republic of China's (PRC) economic and other abuses of our freedoms ([Trump, 2020](#)), prohibiting PRC nationals with connections to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from applying for student visas for national security-sensitive graduate programs ([Wong & Barnes, 2020](#)), addressing the vulnerabilities of American universities and colleges to foreign funding ([Reichmann, 2020](#)),<sup>8</sup> halting slave labor-based imports ([Lawder, 2021](#)),<sup>9</sup> and initiating greater scrutiny of the efforts of foreign actors to undermine domestic election security ([CRS, 2019](#)).

### Making America Dangerous Again

The Biden Administration's approach to homeland security and immigration to date is arguably the metaphorical embodiment of an "America Last" approach. Failure to prioritize American interests can have severe and even lethal effects on Americans, their security, and their freedoms. Below is only a snapshot of the current administration's actions and inactions that may be putting Americans at risk:

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<sup>6</sup> The National Risk Management Center is housed within DHS's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and was specifically created to facilitate intergovernmental and private-sector coordination on cybersecurity, while the Cyber Unified Coordination Group is a joint effort among DHS, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Cyber Supply Chain Risk Management is the process developed by the Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology to identify, assess, and mitigate risks associated with information, communications, and operational technology supply chains.

<sup>7</sup> The Trump Administration's invocation of the Stafford Act, which provided access to nationwide emergency authorities and corresponding funding for state, local, and tribal jurisdictions across the country), allowed the federal government to make additional funds available for emergency state, local, and tribal response that ordinarily would not have been accessible. Former acting Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf put the funding and its availability in an infrastructural context when he noted in his 2020 "State of the Homeland" address that the funding essentially allowed the Federal Emergency Management Administration to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as if the agency was "responding to a category 5 hurricane in every state, territory, and the District of Columbia – all at the same time."

<sup>8</sup> The Trump Administration's designation of the Confucius Institute U.S. Center as a "foreign mission of the Chinese Communist Party" reflected the administration's position that the PRC used that entity to "[take] advantage of America's openness to undertake large-scale and well-funded propaganda efforts and influence operations in this country."

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the most prominent example of the Trump Administration's anti-slave labor efforts is its restrictions on cotton and tomato imports from Xinjiang because of the PRC's use of Uighur slave labor in that province.

- *Reversing Immigration Gains:* The Biden Administration reversed unprecedented improvements in border security and immigration enforcement at a record-setting pace. Since January 20, 2021, it has effectively, if not literally, invited hundreds of thousands of foreign nationals to seek asylum or illegally enter the United States (and created from whole cloth a massive humanitarian failure in the process) ([Hoonhout, 2020](#), [Binder, 2019](#), & [Bensman, 2021](#)), shut down international cooperation that had successfully reduced illegal immigration to the United States between 2017 and 2021 ([Miroff, 2020](#), [Blinken, 2021](#), & [Shaw, 2021](#)),<sup>10</sup> exposed Americans to unknown COVID-19 risk through the unchecked entry of potentially tens of thousands of contagious individuals at the United States-Mexico border ([Morrison & Giaritelli, 2021](#) & [Miller, 2021](#)),<sup>11</sup> established new benefits for illegal aliens in a time of threats to Americans' freedom and opportunities ([USCIS, 2021a](#), [Hackman, 2021a](#), [Bedard, 2021](#), [Moore, 2021](#), & [Ramos, 2021](#)),<sup>12</sup> and withdrawn regulations and other policies that had been designed to prevent employers from employing illegal labor and suppressing wages ([Hackman, 2021b](#), [Guzzardi, 2021](#), [USCIS, 2021b](#), & [Barrett, 2021](#)).<sup>13</sup> These and other reversals of American-focused policies are key elements of an intentional campaign to swell the illegal alien population in the United States and create artificial pressure for a future amnesty ([Binder, 2021a](#), [Pollak, 2021](#), [Munro, 2021](#), & [Jaffe, 2021](#)).<sup>14</sup>
- *Weakening Counterterrorism Capacity:* The Biden Administration has taken steps to reduce our capacity to screen and vet foreign nationals seeking to come to the United States and make it more difficult to identify threats already on our soil. Since January 20, 2021, it has canceled the previous administration's terror-focused travel restrictions ([Bradner, Klein & Hickey, 2021](#)), restored catch and release ([Eustachewich, 2021](#), [Stimson,](#)

<sup>10</sup> The Biden Administration took immediate steps to terminate the previous administration's Asylum Cooperation Agreements (ACAs) with El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and instead is looking to provide foreign assistance to these countries in lieu of the ACAs.

<sup>11</sup> The Biden Administration admitted publicly that it has no plans to implement COVID-19 testing of foreign nationals being admitted at the United States-Mexico border and instead indicated that it expects "local health systems" to handle the testing burden. These and other administration comments led Arizona's Cochise County Sheriff Mark Dannels to assert, among other things, that the Biden Administration's handling of the potential COVID-19 influx at the United States-Mexico border "goes against the grain of the CDC."

<sup>12</sup> The Biden Administration's USCIS, the agency within DHS that is responsible for immigration adjudications and naturalization, has already announced its suspension of biometrics collection requirements for certain visa applicants, effective for two years as of May 17, 2021. The Biden Administration, in conjunction with state and local governments nationwide, has also committed to the continuation of key taxpayer-subsidized services for non-citizens, including under circumstances where those same services are not available to some or all citizens. For instance, the Biden Administration recently enacted legislation that, based on initial estimates, would allow roughly 2.1 million illegal aliens present in the United States to receive approximately \$4.38 billion in COVID-19 relief checks. The Biden Administration has also defended San Diego County public schools for providing in-class spring break instruction to illegal alien children when other county residents were barred from the same access.

<sup>13</sup> The Biden Administration restored foreign worker recruitment by allowing the previous administration's COVID-19 foreign worker visa suspensions to expire, despite the federal government's and states' continuing COVID-19 restrictions for citizens. They also restored the random lottery for receipt of H-1B visas by delaying the effective date of the previous administration's wage-based selection final rule. The Biden Administration has also issued 22,000 H-2B seasonal non-agricultural visas above the statutory cap, despite federal data showing that approximately 17.4 million Americans are unemployed. The Biden Administration's USCIS is also deferring to prior determinations of visa eligibility instead of statutorily required new determinations, which may be illegal.

<sup>14</sup> While the Biden Administration's conduct and words appear to be creating problems at the United States-Mexico border, the administration has also expressed support for fairly revolutionary immigration legislation, all at a time when the federal immigration system is arguably overwhelmed.



[2021](#), & [McDuffee, 2021](#)), added to an already overwhelming asylum case backlog ([Ordóñez, 2021](#) & [Keene, 2021](#)),<sup>15</sup> accelerated refugee admissions commitments beyond current federal screening and vetting capacity (which also fuels the asylum case backlog ([Binder, 2021b](#), [Alvarez & Vazquez, 2021](#), [DOS, 2021](#), & [Mora, 2021](#)),<sup>16</sup> and politicized counterterrorism efforts in a way that may ultimately increase the American public's risk of, and exposure to, terrorism from domestic and international sources ([Evans, 2021](#), [Robertson & Mehsud, 2021](#), [Qandil, 2021](#), & [Hoft, 2021](#)).<sup>17</sup>

- *Exposing Critical Infrastructure:* The Biden Administration's initial missteps on critical physical and digital infrastructure raise early concerns about its strategy and have the potential to send the wrong signals to both friends and enemies. Since January 20, 2021, it has missed opportunities to harden key physical infrastructure in a supportive congressional environment ([Kovaleski, 2021](#)), conveyed a federal willingness to respond to cyberterrorists' demands (and support others who do) ([Garber, 2021](#)),<sup>18</sup> re-engaged with foreign governments that are known sponsors of cyberterrorism ([Cimpanu, 2020](#), [Taylor, 2021](#)), and stripped existing protections of critical infrastructure in the possible absence of viable substitutes ([Exec. Order No. 13920, 2020](#), [Exec. Order No. 13990, 2021](#)).
- *Resurrecting Foreign Influence:* The Biden Administration has demonstrated a willingness to return to warmer relationships with foreign powers that have undermined the United States in the past and may continue to do so. Since January 20, 2021, it has eliminated university transparency requirements designed to highlight foreign funding ([Davidson, 2021](#) & ([Dunleavy, 2021](#))), provided economic benefits to potentially hostile

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<sup>15</sup> The Biden Administration acknowledged that the existing asylum case backlog is more than 1.2 million as of April 2021. An anonymous Mexican government official recently stated that the organized criminal organizations, which profit from illegal immigration by shepherding large numbers of foreign nationals to the United States-Mexico border in the hopes of obtaining asylum, changed their approach "from the day [President] Biden took office."

<sup>16</sup> After initially agreeing to maintain the previous administration's refugee ceiling determination of 15,000 for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, the Biden Administration reversed course and more than quadrupled its FY 2021 proposal, although it also acknowledged the unlikelihood of hitting that ceiling. It is also already on record in support of a determination of 125,000 for FY 2022. Increases in refugee admission targets, regardless of intent, have historically negatively impacted the federal government's ability to adjudicate existing asylum claims within reasonable time frames. For example, the previous administration's report to Congress on the proposed FY 2021 refugee ceiling stated that, at the time of publication of the report, there were more than 1.1 million asylum applicants awaiting adjudication of their claims. In addition, the Biden Administration reversed the previous administration's commitment to consult with state and local governments in the refugee resettlement process before making any final domestic resettlement decisions.

<sup>17</sup> The Biden Administration has stated unequivocally that it believes white supremacist groups now represent the most significant domestic terrorism threat, although it is reasonable to say that, even if this is its most honest assessment, saying so publicly could have unintended effects, including spurring other dangerous individuals and groups to take advantage of what they perceive as a lack of domestic law enforcement focus.

<sup>18</sup> The Biden Administration has arguably sent mixed signals about the propriety of the Colonial Pipeline ransomware payments and whether it had knowledge of Colonial's plan to pay before payment. It is also unclear if Colonial Pipeline management sought approval from the Biden Administration to make the ransom payment or even if the Biden Administration instructed Colonial Pipeline to make the payment. Regardless of what happened, this lack of clarity can have unintended consequences.



state actors ([Lawler, 2021](#)), and implied a lack of concern about foreign interference in domestic elections ([Phillips, 2021](#) & [Jalonick & Tucker, 2020](#)).<sup>19</sup>

### Americans Want Homeland Security

While recent polling on immigration is generally positive and reflects America's historical embrace of immigration, it also reflects concerns about the Biden Administration's handling of the United States-Mexico border situation and perspective on the immigration system as a whole. For example:

- A Rasmussen Reports poll, conducted from March 8-9, 2021, states that “73% of Likely U.S. Voters are concerned about the government’s ability to handle the growing numbers of migrants at the border while meeting COVID-19 protocols.” More than 60 percent of these same likely voters favor fundamental changes to, or elimination of, immigration law pull factors in exchange for amnesty for illegal aliens ([Rasmussen, 2021](#)).
- A Pew Research Center poll, conducted from April 5-11, 2021, states that “majorities in *both* parties say the government has done a bad job of dealing with the influx of asylum seekers at the border.” The poll also notes that “clear majorities of both Democrats and Republicans say it is at least somewhat important both to increase staff and resources available to patrol and police the border and to process [UACs] more quickly” ([Pew Research, 2021](#)).
- A Pew Research Center poll of Hispanic Americans, conducted in March 2021, notes that 44 percent of Hispanic Americans, which is close to the 48 percent for U.S. adults overall, have expressed that “illegal immigration is a very big problem in the country today.” While 68 percent of Hispanic Republicans supported increasing security along the United States-Mexico border, one in three Hispanic Democrats also favored increasing border security ([Krogstad & Lopez, 2021](#)).
- The security concerns of Americans go beyond immigration. A Pew Research Center panel poll, conducted from February 1-7, 2021, found that approximately 90 percent of Americans view the PRC as an enemy or competitor rather than a friend or partner. More than half of Americans also believed there should be limits on student visas for Chinese nationals to mitigate the threat of the PRC’s influence in the United States ([Silver, Devlin, & Huang, 2021](#)).

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<sup>19</sup> The Biden Administration's recent assertions, made through agencies, that there was no evidence of PRC, Russian, or Iranian interference in the 2020 presidential election conflicts with President Biden's previous comments as a candidate. For instance, in July 2020, candidate Biden asserted, based on then-current intelligence briefings provided to him as a presidential candidate, that “Russia, China, and other adversaries were attempting to undermine the presidential election,” and that “Russia was ‘still engaged’ after 2016 and that China was also involved in efforts to sow doubts in the American electoral process.”

## **WHY AFPI IS ESSENTIAL**

AFPI represents a unique voice in the homeland security arena. While other non-profit organizations can provide research and perspective on issues, AFPI offers the academic work and real-world experience of the men and women who were part of the mission in both the Trump Administration and other administrations and have put ideas to the test. This empowers AFPI to do the following:

- Policy: AFPI aims to produce well-researched and -developed draft executive policies and legislation that will inspire federal, state, and local government officials and everyday American citizens to consider the best way to protect and defend Americans and provide the beachhead for future success.
- Analysis: AFPI will work to ensure sober, objective, experience-based analysis of current policy developments and changes and how they reflect departures from previous policies. Our leadership and insights will be based on our experiences and relationships from years of previous federal service and partnerships with state and local leaders. Our knowledge and insight will be increasingly important during administrations that may resist full transparency or accountability.
- Grassroots: AFPI understands that personnel is policy and that the best-laid policy plans will fail without skilled and dedicated men and women to make it happen. We will therefore work with others to educate tomorrow's homeland security leaders. Research and policy development through the lens of experience that will serve Americans for decades to come will go hand in hand with our commitment to policy development.

## **DEVELOPING A TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA**

The contrast between the Trump Administration's recent policies and the Biden Administration's current policies arguably presents a unique opportunity to study very different approaches to key homeland security and immigration policies. AFPI will explore and educate the American people about these contrasts, and it is our hope that these efforts will ensure continued American security and success for generations to come.

## **BORDER SECURITY AND IMMIGRATION**

A nation that does not control its borders or who it allows within its borders is not a nation at all but a target. We will provide research and products that do the following:

- Assess how completion of the physical border wall along the United States-Mexico border could impact security vulnerabilities along our border, at our ports of entry, and in the immediate interior of the United States



- Explore how a combination of visionary commercial development along the southern border and reevaluation of border-related international agreements and memberships could revolutionize both border security and regional prosperity
- Determine how a potential refocusing of DHS on interior immigration enforcement, a more agile and flexible cross-agency immigration workforce, interior immigration enforcement standards, immigration detention space needs, and greater federal, state, and local law enforcement collaboration could impact domestic security and public safety
- Consider how international agreements, visa sanctions, and 21st-century economic development could ultimately impact mass illegal immigration and asylum fraud in the western hemisphere
- Educate about success-oriented, merit-based immigration concepts, the diversity visa lottery, the naturalization process, the potential value of assimilation, and other aspects of our immigration system that put Americans first
- Evaluate options for reducing federal bureaucratic challenges and inefficiencies in our immigration programs, including the visa issuance and asylum adjudication processes
- Assess the impact of amnesty proposals and messaging, the *Flores* settlement agreement, and other features of the current immigration landscape on mass illegal immigration and human trafficking in the western hemisphere

## **COUNTERTERRORISM**

Vigilance against terrorism, an ever-present threat at home and abroad, requires a certain perspective and certain resources. We will provide research and products that do the following:

- Assess the impact of the National Vetting Center and federal screening and vetting authorities, including the effect of modern technology on the screening and vetting process, on our government's ability to ensure domestic security and public safety
- Evaluate how greater information-sharing and cooperation with foreign governments could impact both domestic and international security
- Consider how recent changes to domestic refugee admissions and resettlement processes could affect federal screening and vetting capacity, domestic security and public safety, and other governmental obligations to the American people



- Understand how past and present domestic federal and collaborative counterterrorism tools enhance law enforcement's and citizens' abilities to disrupt organized violence

## **CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

America's physical and digital infrastructure is the indispensable core of modern civilization. We will provide research and products that do the following:

- Review the degree to which our nationwide physical infrastructure, including power grids, water supply systems, and transportation networks, might be vulnerable to malicious actors and natural phenomenon ([Dockrill, 2018](#)) and what steps could be taken to shield that infrastructure against future harm<sup>20</sup>
- Evaluate which domestic policies and enforcement mechanisms have proven most effective for tackling cyberterrorists and their weapons of choice, including ransomware attacks
- Consider how alterations to, or reinforcements of, the critical infrastructure workforce could impact domestic and international security
- Review of existing international coordination and collaboration efforts against malicious cyber actors and their attacks, as well as their state sponsors or protectors, and the degree to which they have been effective

## **FOREIGN INFLUENCE**

America's best interests should always drive the way the United States interacts with foreign governments and peoples. We will provide research and products that do the following:

- Assess the degree to which foreign governments and populations assert influence on American institutions and populations in ways that might not ultimately serve the best interests of our Nation and identify those potentially malign influences
- Evaluate the degree to which foreign governments and populations impact American universities and colleges, including through different types of monetary or other support.

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<sup>20</sup> America's power grid is currently just as vulnerable to crippling natural phenomena as it is to manmade attacks. One such natural phenomenon that could cause extensive damage is known as a coronal mass ejection (CME), which occurs when the sun flares off an extraordinary amount of energy. CMEs are not hypothetical events and have occurred in the past. By at least some estimates, a direct global hit from a CME at this time, absent additional measures to protect key infrastructure, could "knock out" most of the Earth's electricity production and other electricity-dependent infrastructure for years. The long-term impacts on humanity are obviously unknown but would likely be unprecedented.



- Review how sanctions against foreign governments and populations, including visa sanctions, could impact foreign governments' or populations' actions
- Understand how international slave labor impacts the domestic and international economies, intergovernmental coordination, and the global human rights landscape
- Determine the degree to which foreign governments and populations might have the capacity to digitally influence or interfere with American elections and propose steps to address any identified vulnerabilities

## **WHAT THIS MEANS FOR AMERICANS**

America's recent experiences have shown us there is a difference between a nation that has leadership and a nation that is in charge. This lesson is all too apparent when it comes to homeland security. AFPI is committed to presenting products and ideas that have been proven to work in the past.

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES**

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