



The global benefits of U.S. defenses: Securing the new borders

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NEW YORK: Starting this month, the U.S. Coast Guard will board every foreign-flagged vessel upon its first attempt to enter an American port. By inspecting each ship and sending officers abroad to inspect ports of origin, "Operation Port Shield" will ensure worldwide compliance with America's new security standards. Not since the embargo of Imperial Japan has America seen such a far-flung interdiction campaign. Yet, for all its drama, Operation Port Shield is only a small part of the post-Sept. 11 American agenda to build a global security framework regulating the flow of goods and people across borders.

Because the United States now faces an undefined battlefield and far more potential points of attack, the country's future security relies on creating a virtual border. American security initiatives have begun this process, in essence building international law by creating enforceable standards.

Paradoxically, by working outside the framework of international organizations, America has contributed to global security and tied its own security to that of most of the world.

During the cold war, the Iron Curtain demarcated the border between ally and enemy. In countries like Germany and South Korea, U.S. troops were a palpable military presence as they protected the free world's frontier. Today the United States faces an entirely new security paradigm, as there is no clear geographic demarcation between friend and foe. Hence, as much of the focus on security has shifted to non-military mediums such as civil aviation and shipping, the United States has broadened the security agenda, effectively doing to America's commercial relationships what it had previously done to its military alliances: shifting the burden of enforcement overseas so that fewer Americans are exposed to foreign threats.

The American effort initially focused on securing international shipping to prevent weapons of mass destruction from entering the United States. The Department of Homeland Security's container-security initiative utilizes a new system to screen dangerous cargo among the seven million containers bound for American ports each year. Nineteen of the world's top 20 ports, accounting for approximately two-thirds of U.S.-bound containers, have agreed to join the container security initiative and are at various stages of its implementation. Within these ports, U.S. officials are working with their foreign counterparts to ensure compliance with American security requirements, shifting the point of screening to departure rather than arrival.

At the same time, the proliferation security initiative is a multilateral activity undertaken to halt weapons of mass destruction shipments. Fifteen core states - including Japan, Britain, France and Germany - have agreed to carry out cargo interdictions at sea, in the air or on land. Liberia and Panama have also agreed to permit inspectors to board suspect ships flying their flags. Their

assent is significant since they possess the largest registered fleets. Hence, with the support of over 80 nations, an American initiative has eclipsed the age-old freedom of the seas.

For over a year now, shippers to the United States have also been subject to the 24-hour rule requiring that they submit a cargo declaration one full day prior to loading cargo in a foreign port for transport to the United States. While shippers once feared that this rule would mire them in endless paperwork and inflict huge costs, they now acknowledge that the system works smoothly and increases efficiency.

Tracing the supply chain even further, the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism was instituted as a joint government-business initiative to strengthen supply chain and border security. To participate, businesses voluntarily undertake comprehensive self-assessments and improvements of their supply-chain security. In exchange, these businesses become "trusted shippers" and face fewer customs inspections. Within this partnership, American guidelines are strengthening the integrity of supply chain security in virtually every country.

In an effort to better screen the more than 400 million people who cross over U.S. borders each year, the Homeland Security Department recently awarded a multibillion dollar contract to a private company to set up a worldwide network of databases to track visitors before they even arrive in this country. To facilitate pre-screening of air passengers, the European Union recently signed an accord with the United States to provide 34 items of information for each passenger aboard a civilian aircraft bound for the United States. While the European Parliament is contesting this accord as violation of personal privacy, some form of accommodation remains virtually inevitable. Hence, Washington is creating a global standard for the use of personal information, at least where a security nexus exists.

The effects of America's unilateral approach to designing and enforcing strict security standards are widespread. At a fundamental level, the United States has sidestepped international law by unilaterally imposing its own vision of global security. On a practical level, though, American initiatives may also have bolstered the multilateral system, as they serve to augment the elements of international order that are spotty and frequently unenforceable.

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