

Week 5: Is Homeland Security Really Enough?

With the growing reality that war with Iraq is inevitable, the leaders of the United States must evaluate the risk such war would bring to US soil. After reading an article in the NY Times that, on a very superficial level, analyzed the state of homeland security, I am forced to wonder what, if anything the Homeland Security can do to protect the United States? I also really question the decision to go to war with Iraq, not from a political point of view, but from a military one.

Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge “officially” acknowledged that “there may be more threats, there have been more threats, if we go to war.” I ask, was this threat not clear before? What new information is Tom Ridge providing to the American people that we didn’t already know?

Tom Ridge says of Homeland Security that “our job is to be as prepared as much as we possibly can.” Is the goal of Homeland Security to do their best, or is there a goal more concrete than this? Homeland Security’s initial budget was 30 billion dollars. Bush has requested to raise this to \$38 billion. This is of course a significant amount of money and is distributed across such agencies as the Customs Service, the Secret Service, and the Coast Guard. Why is Homeland Security so vague when it comes to telling the press what it is actually doing to help secure the US homeland?

Homeland Security is in charge of the nation’s “terrorist alert level.” After 20 days of being on “high risk,” we were recently brought back to “elevated risk.” However, with the recent capture of senior Qaeda operative Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the alert level may soon be raised again. Is this the primary method that Homeland Security is going to use to fight terrorism?

I don't mean to sound too critical of the Homeland Security. After all, it is the only defense we have against terrorism. However, I do mean to be critical elsewhere. Over the last century, the United States has been fairly good about choosing wars that end up not hitting US soil (Pearl harbor the exception). We are about to enter a war knowing full well that this war will be brought to US soil. US intelligence agencies have reported "from a variety of sources – including interviews with captured Qaeda terrorists and electronic surveillance – that terror groups hoped to time a major attack to the beginning of an American military campaign against Iraq." This will be the first war where the US soil is attacked by an enemy without a face. Is the United States, with its Homeland Security defense, ready to fight this war? Our military is in the mid-east, but is the war really going to be on US soil?