

## **B431. "Safety Cards" National Review Online (October 3, 2002: p. 7 - 8).**

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In March 2003 the FBI issued a worldwide alert for Adnan El Shukrijumah, who is sought for questioning in connection with possible terrorist threats against the United States. A major problem in apprehending him: He uses a variety of aliases and fake documents. The government's new terrorist watch list, airline passenger-screening network, and foreign student tracking system all face the same problems. No matter how well these networks function at tracking the right people, they are easy to fool with fake documents. The best solution is national I.D. cards.

Many Americans have long had a strong visceral reaction against required I.D. cards, which they associate with "domestic passports" used in the Soviet Union. The right to be let alone is widely associated with the notion that a person has a right to remain anonymous unless authorities can demonstrate a reason why they suspect the person committed a crime. But Americans increasingly recognize that one cannot fly, drive, go overseas, enter many public buildings, or even cash a check, without some form of identification. To say that I.D.s Americans use every day, like driver's licenses and social security cards, are voluntary is simply a joke.

Terrorists and criminals are also covered by the de facto requirement to have an I.D. The current problem is not that they have none, but that they have many. While most Americans have no reason to purchase false I.D.s, they are easy to obtain. (Under-age college kids, after all, have little trouble getting into bars that way.) Issuing I.D. cards that are resistant to fraud will do nothing to harm law-abiding Americans but will crimp the style of those who seek to break the law.

Terrorists will face the greatest inconvenience. Most of the 19 hijackers of 9/11 had multiple I.D.s, which they used to open bank accounts, take flying lessons, and buy airline tickets. The newly created Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services at the Department of Homeland Security has introduced a foreign student tracking system that will allow us to find out if a person who came to study in the U.S. is actually attending classes on a campus. But all this is useless unless it's possible to establish the identity of the person being traced. All too often, it isn't.

The I.D. cards won't only be useful against terrorists: Criminals on the lam will be unable to escape their past records and child-care centers can avoid hiring sex offenders. Better I.D.s would greatly curtail the high price of identity theft, which cost the public at least \$750 million in 1997. They would also shave income tax fraud committed by those who file multiple tax returns (a savings of \$1 billion per year) and welfare fraud (saving \$10 billion per year). Indeed the public is wising up. As of February 2003, 64 percent of Americans favored the adoption of a national I.D. system for all U.S. citizens.

I.D. cards are becoming increasingly foolproof: biometric systems-which measure fingerprints, faces, or irises-can make it impossible for people to switch I.Ds.

We live in a new world. To live in it, we have to make some carefully measured adjustments to our way of life. To require all Americans to identify themselves in a reliable manner, as law-abiding Americans already do, is a reasonable and vital step in the right direction.

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