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New Cabinet-level department holds promise, challenge

Proposed Department of Homeland Security will require careful planning and cooperation

In the months that have passed since the September 11 assaults against the United States, the American people have rallied together and shown their patriotism, resilience and determination. Even so, millions continue to wait for the next wave of attacks against their freedom—against this democracy—as additional intelligence only confirms the ongoing nature of the threat; the next terror assault is not a matter of “if,” but “when.”

Earlier this month, President George W. Bush unveiled a proposal to establish a Cabinet-level department that would have broad authority over border security, intelligence analysis, transportation security and protection of the national infrastructure. Bush’s plan resurrects the recommendations of a bipartisan committee led by former senators Gary Hart (D-Colo.) and Warren Rudman (R-N.H.), which called for the establishment of a National Homeland Security Agency. By unifying many of the agencies involved in different aspects of homeland security, the country can develop a clearer picture of the terrorist threat and proactively move to thwart it. Enacting the President’s recommendation, however, will involve overcoming many significant challenges.

The March 15, 2001, edition of The Lipman Report analyzed the major findings and recommendations of the Hart-Rudman commission. This issue explores the benefits and challenges of President Bush’s proposed reorganization in light of the ongoing war on terror.

September 11: A preventable tragedy?

Numerous reports of disparate items of intelligence within the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) have surfaced in the months following the terrorist attacks, and congressional hearings have begun to consider whether the horror of that day could have been prevented and to search for ways to improve antiterrorism efforts.

- A memo written in July 2001 in which an FBI agent in Phoenix raised his suspicions about several men of Arab descent who were training at an aviation school in Arizona. The multipage memo recommended contacting other flight schools nationwide where Arabs might be studying.
- The CIA’s identification of Khalid al-Midhar, one of the hijackers who died in the attack on

the Pentagon, as an al Qaeda operative in early 2001. The agency’s failure to disclose to other federal agencies Midhar’s connection with the terrorist group allowed him unhindered access to the United States, with the U.S. Department of State routinely renewing his expired visa last June.

- The rejection of a warrant request from the FBI’s Minneapolis field office to examine the computer of Zacarias Moussaoui, a French citizen of Moroccan descent arrested last year in Minnesota on an immigration violation. A flight school instructor became suspicious of Moussaoui’s desire to learn to fly—but not to take off or land—a commercial jet.

Given the stunning clarity of hindsight, these disclosures have provoked considerable debate concerning these two federal agencies and their inter- and intra-organizational communication.

Although public opinion of both the Bureau and the CIA has dipped as a result of these allegations, security experts and many national leaders—including President Bush—assert that none of the information available to the U.S. government on September 10, 2001, could have averted the tragedies of the following day. The overwhelming amount of intelligence gathered on a continuous basis by agencies such as the FBI, the CIA and the National Security Agency (NSA) simply cannot be analyzed and compiled into a cohesive picture rapidly enough to keep up with new developments.

Even accepting that these instances would not have prevented the September 11 attacks, the leaders of these organizations are treating the lapses very seriously. FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III, for instance, has publicly stated the need to reorganize the Bureau, changing the agency’s current role as a primarily reactive law enforcement agency to a more proactive organization with a greater focus on terrorism. Although some may view this proposed change as a radical departure, in truth it simply continues the Bureau’s long his-

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tory of evolving to meet the various security challenges that have faced the nation—from Communism and the Cold War to organized crime to drug trafficking and now terrorism.

Department of Homeland Security

Set against this backdrop, President Bush proposed the creation of a single, permanent Cabinet-level department dedicated to the overriding mission of securing the homeland of America and protecting the American people. The President's plan echoes many of the recommendations offered by the Hart-Rudman commission after three-and-a-half years of analyzing homeland security. At present, as many as 100 different governmental agencies share the daunting task of securing the nation, with no one entity possessing final accountability. The independent agencies pick up different pieces of the national security puzzle but have no way of determining how their pieces fit in the larger picture. The new Department of Homeland Security would unite these agencies that must work more closely together to provide the essential intelligence required to head off future terrorist attacks.

According to President Bush, the proposed department would be charged with four primary tasks:

- Border control—preventing terrorists and their explosives and equipment from entering the nation.
- Emergency response—coordinating with local and state authorities to ensure rapid, efficient response to emergency situations.
- Scientific research—developing technologies that will detect biological, chemical and nuclear weapons, as well as discovering drugs and other medical treatments to protect the American people.
- Intelligence gathering—reviewing intelligence and law enforcement information from all

government agencies and developing a cohesive, daily assessment of threats against homeland security. Analysts will imagine and plan for worst-case scenarios.

The President envisions creating this department, which would employ 169,000 people and have combined budgets of \$37.4 billion, by folding existing agencies under a single jurisdiction. Under this scenario, the Department of Homeland Security would not necessarily increase the size of government, but would expand its focus and effectiveness by ending duplication and overlap of duties among the agencies that would be combined. Eliminating such waste would ultimately decrease overhead, said President Bush in his remarks, utilizing federal resources in a more efficient manner.

If approved by Congress, Bush's proposal would represent the most extensive reorganization of the federal government since the 1940s. At that time, President Harry Truman united the nation's military forces under the Department of Defense and combined defense, intelligence and diplomacy functions under the National Security Council.

President Bush unveiled his plan, which had been months in the making, on the same day that Congress began hearings on possible intelligence oversights. White House representatives have indicated that the new agency would not replace the FBI and the CIA; instead, it would supplement the efforts of those organizations, currently slated to remain largely intact.

Challenges of reorganization

Although most experts agree that the proposed reorganization is essential to ensuring national security, they also foresee many obstacles to its successful execution.

One of the most significant obstacles lies in the timing. The reorganization under President Truman took place after the end of World War II. By contrast, the United States is currently

engaged in an all-out war against terrorism, one that shows no sign of ending in the foreseeable future. The nation experienced a small disruption during World War II with the construction of the Pentagon, which commenced just months before the attack on Pearl Harbor and ended in January 1943, but that reorganization merely involved a physical relocation. Bush's plan calls for an extensive overhaul of numerous federal agencies with critical roles in ensuring national security.

The events of September 11 forever changed the nation, forcing it to recognize its vulnerability to the violence that was formerly restricted to other parts of the globe. Americans will never again be able to turn their back on the terrorist threat that stems not only from the Middle East, but also from other extremist groups, including home-grown critics of the U.S. government. Many authorities fear that, by undertaking this reorganization as a nation under siege, the government may lose its focus on the war or, conversely, that the ongoing war will dilute the effectiveness of the new department, since the government will be unable to devote its attention fully to either effort.

Like the war on terrorism, the proposed reorganization will require federal resources of monumental proportions. In revealing the plan, President Bush asked Congress to approve the creation of the new department before the end of the current session, but any such action would require months—if not years—before effective implementation.

First, it is highly unlikely that Congress will approve the President's proposal as presented. Several senators have already formulated their own reorganization strategies. As one critic describes the situation, Bush's recommendation creates the new organization before the nation can gain a thorough understanding of the potential threats or develop a clear strategy for addressing them. Agreeing upon a plan for reorganization will likely take months.

Secondly, the sheer magnitude of the project will necessitate several months of intense activity simply to work out a plan of action. Some of the agencies that have been mentioned as candidates to be rolled into the new department include the U.S. Border Patrol, the Coast Guard, the Customs Service and the Secret Service. Determining how to unify such widely diverse activities in a single organization will be a Herculean task. Some experts have suggested that the federal government employ the consulting services of a corporate leader with extensive expertise in mergers and acquisitions to help identify the most efficient means of combining the many agencies that currently handle the different aspects of homeland security.

Furthermore, the creation of a Department of Homeland Security will inevitably trigger considerable infighting in Congress as the nation's leaders jockey for prime positions of power over the new agency. Eighty-eight committees and subcommittees currently govern the numerous agencies that share the responsibility for various aspects of homeland security; consolidating those positions of authority could turn into a political nightmare. Additionally, turf wars will undoubtedly erupt among existing government departments that stand to lose major agencies in the reorganization.

The need for action

Despite these many obstacles, the President's plan has met with widespread, bipartisan support. Opinions differ on the best way to proceed with reorganizing the government, but most Congressional leaders applaud Bush's recommendation, describing it as "in the interest of the security of every citizen of America." Others share the belief that the proposed Department of Homeland Security could ultimately save money through efficiency gains by

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eliminating some of the duplication that exists throughout the current, disjointed system.

The middle of a war is not the most auspicious time to undertake an extensive government overhaul, but the direness of the situation leaves the nation little choice. Too many different players hold the awesome responsibility of protecting the homeland, and the magnitude of the job prevents them from accomplishing the task effectively. Without an overall organization to direct and coordinate the myriad aspects of national security—from border patrol to visa and immigration regulations to gathering and analyzing intelligence—the United States cannot develop an accurate threat assessment, much less act to thwart future attacks.

Determining the best way to proceed, however, will prove a formidable task in and of itself. To this end, the United States must draw upon the brightest and the best minds among her citizenry, not restricted to elected officials in Washington, D.C. Many corporate leaders routinely deal with complex reorganization matters resulting not only from consolidation, but also from economic or industry downturns and the ongoing need to improve efficiency levels and adapt to a rapidly changing, global marketplace. The country's leaders need to avail themselves of this rich trove of expertise, harnessing the intellectual capital of the United States and focusing it on this new challenge. Once more, national unity holds the key to overcoming obstacles.

Nine months after the terrorist attacks that forever altered life in the United States, the nation continues to seek answers to the question: what weaknesses allowed the unthinkable to happen at home? Amid a flurry of disclosures of embarrassing intelligence lapses in the months preceding the September 11 assaults, the U.S. Congress is conducting hearings in an effort to identify what signs were missed and whether existing procedures failed to protect the U.S. people on that fateful day. Those entities in charge of ferreting out and disseminating the truth must make a concerted

effort to separate objective facts from the keenly intuitive flashes that characterize 20/20 hindsight. By resisting the all-too-human temptation to play the "blame game," the country's leaders can instead concentrate their efforts on changing shortcomings in the system to help prevent similar attacks in the future.

With his proposal to establish the Department of Homeland Security, President Bush has recommended an important step toward rectifying weaknesses and elevating the focus of the hearings now taking place on Capitol Hill. The plan has widespread acceptance overall, but faces many challenges before it can take a usable shape and safeguard the American people from terrorist attacks, both foreign and domestic. Congress must work closely with the White House to swiftly develop a strategy and action plan.

To help them accomplish this task, members of the federal government should draw upon the resources of their constituents, meeting with corporate leaders to discuss best practices in reorganization. The strength of the United States has always rested in the rich diversity of skills and talents possessed by the American people; it is time for the nation's leaders to draw upon this wealth of experience to develop an efficient means of unifying its resources to fight this deadly threat.

Merging or combining any type of organization with another involves difficult decisions regarding such matters as technology, human capital, strategies and other tactical plans. An effective reorganization requires building in necessary redundancies to ensure that nothing falls through the cracks while the United States continues the war against terrorism. The Lipman Report editors do not suggest that the nation not move forward with President Bush's plan, but the stakes demand that any action be carefully managed to avoid a potentially disastrous disconnect.



The Lipman Report Editors