

Background

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Organizing for Victory: Proposals for Building a Regional Homeland Security Structure

Edwin Meese III, James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., and Richard Weitz, Ph.D.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is preparing to create a new regional structure that will govern how the DHS interacts with state and local officials and members of the private sector. The plan, which could take several years to implement fully, will undoubtedly engender controversy and debate. Local officials will rightly insist on upholding the principles of federalism. Others are actively lobbying for establishing regional centers in their cities or states.¹ Members of Congress, many of whom have been advocating such a structure for years, will evaluate the rationale and costs of implementing the regional framework.

To make rollout of the plan as effective as possible, DHS leaders should first enunciate its goals and guiding principles. They also must explain how they will reorganize the DHS secretariat to provide efficient oversight of the new structure and achieve all these goals in a cost-effective manner. The DHS should create a regional framework that primarily serves the needs of states, local communities, and the private sector. Its purpose should be to improve coordination, planning, and information sharing, with an emphasis on strengthening intelligence and early warning, critical infrastructure protection, and the preparedness and response components of homeland security.

The Plan for the Plan

Although state and local officials will undoubtedly lead the initial response to any crisis, it is improbable that a major terrorist attack would affect only a single

Talking Points

- The Department of Homeland Security requires a regional structure to coordinate preparedness, prevention, protection, and response activities with state and local governments and the private sector more efficiently.
- DHS innovations like the National Response Plan and the National Incident Management System provide the national hub for building an effective national framework. They are prerequisites for establishing the objective requirements for a regional system.
- The regional DHS network should report to an undersecretary charged with coordinating national outreach programs.
- The department should roll out a concept laying out principles and goals and engage Congress, state and local officials, and the private sector before releasing its plan.

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Produced by the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis
Institute for International Studies

214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

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city or that a single municipal authority would have sufficient assets to manage such a calamity alone. At a minimum, response efforts would likely require mutual aid from multiple jurisdictions. In a major crisis, federal assets would supplement state and local resources. Effective cooperation among officials at all levels of government and the private sector is essential, yet the DHS lacks an adequate regional structure to facilitate coordination.

The National Response Plan (NRP) and the National Incident Management System (NIMS) provide a framework for this activity.² These initiatives provide a single “all-hazards” approach to directing federal resources for meeting any national emergency, ensuring that responses to future incidents, both natural and manmade, will be more coordinated effectively and efficiently. Additionally, the department has established an effective Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC), a round-the-clock “nerve center” that provides a national hub for organizing the federal response to homeland security-related incidents.

The NRP, NIMS, and HSOC were prerequisites to establishing the objective requirements for a regional homeland security framework. The DHS, however, still lacks a suitable operational structure to support them.

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 merged over 22 federal organizations and programs into a single department. As part of this legacy, the DHS inherited at least a dozen different regional structures. Each agency brought its own national framework for directing its operations. For exam-

ple, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) still has 10 regional offices and two area offices. Each region serves several states, and the regional staffs work directly with the states to help plan for disasters, both natural and man-made; develop mitigation programs; and meet needs when major crises occur.³ However, before the department was established, no national framework existed to coordinate all critical homeland security missions.

The Homeland Security Act requires the DHS to propose a regional framework but provides no guidance on how to implement the system or its purpose. It states only that:

Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the [DHS] Secretary shall develop and submit to Congress a plan for consolidating and co-locating—

(1) any regional offices or field offices of agencies that are transferred to the Department under this Act, if such officers are located in the same municipality; and

(2) portions of regional and field offices of other Federal agencies, to the extent such offices perform functions that are transferred to the Secretary under this Act.⁴

Although the department failed to meet the time line established by Congress, it has dedicated considerable effort to developing a national regional structure. DHS leaders intend to establish some eight to 10 regional homeland security centers. At a news conference in New

1. For example, see Nancy A. Youssef and Kathleen Gray, “Ridge Responds About Area Security Issues; Selfridge Not Likely for Regional Leader,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 28, 2004.
2. The NRP integrates a family of federal domestic prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery plans into a single all-hazards plan. See U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “National Response Plan,” December 2004, at www.dhs.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/NRP_FullText.pdf (January 6, 2005). The NIMS establishes standardized procedures for national response, providing a comprehensive national framework for incident management. See U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “National Incident Management System,” March 1, 2004, at www.dhs.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/NIMS-90-web.pdf (January 6, 2005).
3. Federal Emergency Management Agency, “Regional and Area Offices,” updated October 22, 2004, at www.fema.gov/regions (January 6, 2005).
4. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 explicitly defines “local government” to include a “regional or interstate government entity.” Homeland Security Act of 2002, Public Law 107–296, Section 706.

Orleans in February 2004, DHS Secretary Tom Ridge said, “As part of our restructuring plans, we made a decision to establish regional Homeland Security offices.”⁵ Ridge added that each office would employ 50–100 people, most of whom would be administrators.⁶

The proposed regional organization is likely to arouse intense interest among state and local leaders and Members of Congress.⁷ Accordingly, DHS representatives should conduct an effective public information and awareness campaign before the department rolls out its reorganization strategy. At a minimum, this effort should:

- **Enunciate** the goals of the regional framework (i.e., what the regional offices are supposed to accomplish);
- **Explain** how the regional framework will be compatible with the principles of federalism;
- **Include** a plan for restructuring the DHS secretariat to provide effective oversight of the regional framework;
- **Explain** the criteria for selecting regional offices and their personnel (including their directors); and
- **Include** a sensible plan to fund the reorganization without detracting from other high-priority DHS projects.

Above all, DHS leaders need to explain how the regional structure will assist state and local homeland security managers to protect their communities better with respect to all-hazard preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. Before the DHS releases its plans, important issues require resolution—including specifying the potential roles, missions, and functions of the

regional offices, as well as their relationships with state and local officials and the private sector.

Whatever regional security structure the Administration decides to support, the DHS should implement the proposal in a way that allows stakeholders an opportunity to participate in the process to a greater extent than has been the case to date. Through speeches, publications, and other media events, DHS representatives should first announce the principles for regional design that underpin their recommendations. Stakeholders should then be allowed time to comment on them through formal and informal mechanisms. Ideally, such an interactive process would result both in a better proposal and in stakeholders’ becoming more committed to the subsequent reorganization.

DHS Management of a Regional Framework

As a first step, the DHS needs to create a leadership structure to oversee the regional framework. Vesting all responsibility for coordination and outreach with state and local governments and the private sector in a single undersecretary in the directorate should be a priority.

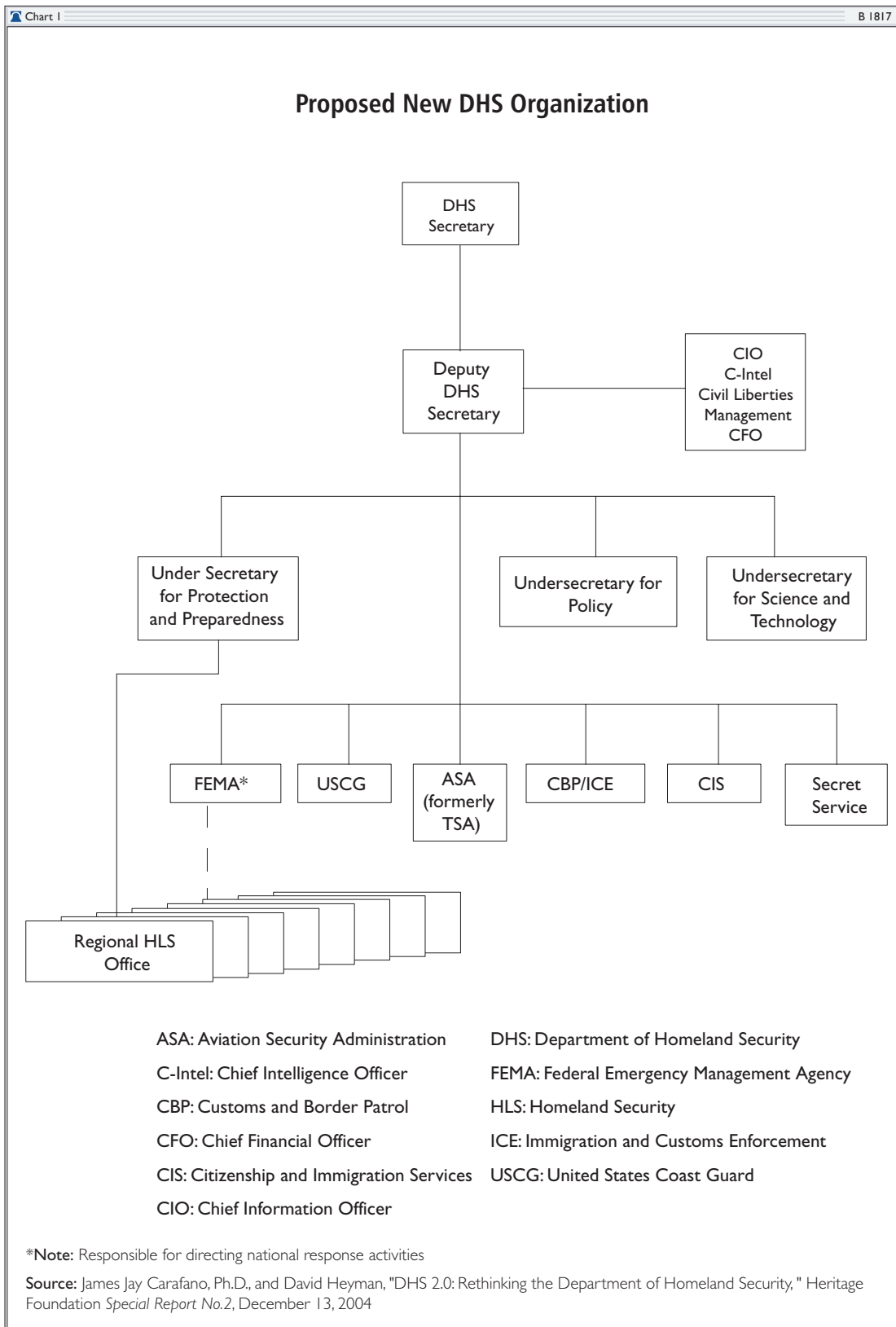
The DHS should consolidate its critical infrastructure protection, preparedness, and state/local/private-sector coordination efforts under an Undersecretary for Protection and Preparedness. This reorganization would merge the following agencies, components, and authorities:

1. The infrastructure protection component of the Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection Directorate,
2. The Office of State and Local Government Coordination and Preparedness,

5. Cited in John McMillan, “Ridge Says La. May Get Security Site,” *The Advocate* (Baton Rouge), February 27, 2004, on Lexis/Nexis.

6. Michael Perlstein and Stewart Yerton, “Ridge Says N.O. in Running for National Security Office; Local Officials Pushing to Land Center in City,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), February 27, 2004.

7. Members of Congress recently reaffirmed their interest in overseeing the department’s regional organization plans, instructing the DHS to notify the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations “at least 10 days prior to any public announcement of any changes to regional or field offices.” U.S. House of Representatives, *Making Appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2005, and for Other Purposes*, H. Rpt. 108–774, 108th Cong., 2nd Sess., October 9, 2004, p. 29.



3. The non-operational transportation infrastructure protection mission of the Transportation Security Administration,
4. The preparedness responsibilities of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Directorate,
5. The private-sector preparedness mission of the Office of Private Sector Liaison, and
6. DHS grantmaking authority.

Consolidating these disparate efforts would provide the DHS Secretary with a stronger platform from which to lead national efforts, determine priorities, identify critical vulnerabilities, work with state/local/private-sector entities on securing those vulnerabilities and preparing for attacks, and make grants to accomplish missions and induce cooperation.⁸

Roles, Missions, and Functions of the Regional Network

The DHS should construct a regional network of support offices reporting to the Undersecretary of Protection and Preparedness. The offices should be led by political appointees who enjoy sufficient clout to gain ready access to local leaders. Ideally, these individuals would include former politicians, police chiefs, and other people who have some background in both homeland security issues and their geographic areas of responsibility.

The DHS could organize periodic specialized training programs for the directors to ensure that they possess adequate expertise in all dimensions of homeland security. The department should also arrange for the directors to meet, perhaps as a group, at least bimonthly in Washington with DHS senior officials. These meetings would keep them knowledgeable about the latest developments at DHS headquarters and provide a nationwide perspective to complement their regional focus. The personnel at the regional offices should number approximately 100 people and include a planning staff, a training staff to coordinate regional exercises, and information technology (IT) and other

specialists to administer the office's small communications/operations center.

The first priority of this regional organization should be to support the flow of information and coordinate training, exercises, and professional development for state and local governments and the private sector. The structure's key operational mission should be to enhance prevention, preparedness, response, and critical infrastructure protection at the regional level, as well as to coordinate activities like intelligence sharing and early warning with the Justice Department's regional Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs).

Although an important task would be to foster mutual aid compacts and joint planning, DHS regional directors should not have authority over existing DHS agencies (such as the Coast Guard or Customs and Border Protection Bureau) or have operational or policymaking responsibilities. For example, FEMA should continue as an independent agency responsible for coordinating federal response to natural and manmade disasters, including terrorism. Similarly, customs and border protection should remain federal responsibilities, with appropriate policies determined in Washington, although reflecting local conditions. DHS regional directors will need to rely primarily on persuasion and on local actors' self-interest in using the regional offices to develop better ties and access to DHS leaders and assets in Washington, including grants and other funding.

As a secondary priority, the DHS regional framework could achieve cost savings and other efficiencies by highlighting regional redundancies and promoting consolidations across geographic boundaries. The July 2002 National Strategy for Homeland Security called for enhanced cooperation among actors at the various levels of government and the private sector to avoid duplication and better integrate scarce national homeland security assets. Obvious candidates for improved regional integration of support functions include IT systems and administrative activities.

8. James Jay Carafano and David Heyman, "DHS 2.0: Rethinking the Department of Homeland Security," Heritage Foundation *Special Report* No. 2, December 13, 2004, p. 14, at www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandDefense/sr02.cfm.

Even when state and local actors desire to possess their own independent support structures, shared procurement could produce cost savings because sellers might lower unit prices in return for the larger purchases. Furthermore, the network could develop resource-sharing and cost-sharing plans for activation during a crisis and manage the coordinated stockpiling of equipment. Congress also might give regional offices discretion over some grant money and other forms of federal preparedness assistance to help correct suboptimal spending allocations within a region as well as to promote homeland security cooperation within regions more generally.⁹

Third, regional offices could better integrate the homeland security programs of state and local entities, both public and private, with DHS policymakers in Washington. Serving as conveniently located points of contact for state, local, and private actors, regional coordinators could assume a lead role in identifying the needs and resources that exist both nationally and within their regions.

Not being based in Washington, DHS officials posted at regional offices might be more attuned to the peculiar needs of state and local stakeholders within their areas, including public officials, first responders, commercial actors, National Guard commanders, and other community leaders. In effect, they would serve as the eyes and ears of the DHS Secretary at the regional level. They could also sponsor pilot projects that, if successful, could be adopted in other regions if not nationally.

Regional offices should also improve situational awareness and transparency among homeland security actors by promoting information sharing among them. Increased data exchanges could occur both electronically, through an expansion of the horizontal communication provided by the Joint Regional

Information Exchange System (JRIES) and related networks, and through additional opportunities for personal encounters. People involved with homeland security at the state and local levels—including first responders, public health experts, and law enforcement officials—have diverse backgrounds and expertise, so their approaches to these issues (as well as their insights regarding them) likely differ. State-level actors in particular could benefit from more frequent interaction with their nearby colleagues given that many crises could easily spill across state boundaries.

The National Incident Management System could provide a framework for sharing regional response assets. It might be appropriate to establish separate Regional NIMS Centers (perhaps with associated Regional Homeland Security Operations Centers or Regional Emergency Operations Centers) within each DHS regional office to supervise and implement this process.¹⁰ These centers could help to shape the elements of the National Response Plan that most concern their regions so that they complement the specific response activities that federal, state, and local agencies are already tasked with developing and implementing.

DHS regional offices could also receive authority over “force packages” consisting of baskets of homeland security resources available within their geographic areas. Supplemented by federal assets, these force packages could bolster state and local entities responding to natural and man-made emergencies.

An Exception to the Plan: The National Capital Region

As defined in U.S. law, the National Capital Region (NCR) encompasses the District of Columbia; Montgomery and Prince George’s

9. The efficacy of using federal grants to support regional cooperation is discussed in U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Homeland Security: Effective Regional Coordination Can Enhance Emergency Preparedness*, GAO-04-1009, November 2004, at www.gao.gov/new.items/d0549.pdf (January 6, 2005). The report also concluded that “federal emergency preparedness grants were often spent by each jurisdiction without considering whether assets and resources purchased already existed in neighboring jurisdictions and could be shared.” *Ibid.*, p. 25. H.R. 3266, which received bipartisan support in the House Homeland Security Committee in 2004, would have provided for such regional terrorism preparedness grants if it had become law.

10. Such a change might require modifying Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5, issued February 28, 2003.

Counties in Maryland; Arlington, Fairfax, Loudon, and Prince William Counties and the City of Alexandria in Virginia; and all cities and other units of government within those jurisdictions.¹¹ Following the terrorist incidents of September 11, 2001, which included an attack on the Pentagon in Arlington, authorities in the NCR enhanced their cooperation on homeland security issues, including emergency preparedness and response. For example, regional working groups (such as the Emergency Preparedness Council, the Senior Policy Group, and the Critical Infrastructure Protection Steering Group) have begun to meet, and NCR-wide exercises have increased in terms of frequency and dimension. The U.S. Northern Command also recently established a new subordinate command, the Joint Force Headquarters–National Capital Region (JFHQ–NCR), to coordinate Department of Defense involvement in the NCR's homeland security activities.

Although the NCR today represents the most prominent regional homeland security organization, the DHS should not attempt to replicate its structure elsewhere. The NCR is atypical in many respects. It does not border a foreign country, and it has a high concentration of closely located federal, state, and local government entities with multiple and often overlapping jurisdictions. It also possesses many high-value terrorist targets, including public officials and national monuments.¹²

Furthermore, Congress singled out the NCR for special treatment when it created an Office of the National Capital Region Coordination (ONCRC) within DHS in the Homeland Security Act of 2002. The ONCRC is tasked with enhancing information sharing within the NCR, coordinating its diverse

preparedness programs, and pooling homeland security resources among NCR-based entities with the intention of encouraging them “to think, plan and prepare regionally” when it comes to security.¹³ The ONCRC does not have an operational mission or crisis-management responsibilities.

Despite these caveats regarding the appropriateness of generalizing from the NCR, designers of future regional DHS offices should examine it closely for lessons that might be applicable elsewhere.

Conclusion

The DHS should create a regional framework with the primary aims of enhancing information sharing and other coordination among the states, the private sector, and the DHS headquarters in Washington. The regional offices should not have operational or policymaking responsibilities.

For the most effective rollout of the plan, DHS leaders should first enunciate its goals and guiding principles. They also must explain how they will reorganize the DHS secretariat to provide effective oversight of the new structure. Stakeholders should be allowed time to comment on the plan's goals and objectives, which should result both in a better proposal and in stakeholders' becoming more committed to the subsequent reorganization.

—Edwin Meese III is a Distinguished Fellow at The Heritage Foundation, where he holds the Ronald Reagan Chair in Public Policy. James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., is Senior Research Fellow for National Security and Homeland Security in the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation. Richard Weitz, Ph.D., is a member of the senior staff at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis.

11. For example, see Homeland Security Act of 2002, Public Law No. 107–296, Section 882, and 10 U.S.C. 2674(2).

12. The NCR “is home to 12 local jurisdictions, two states, the District of Columbia, three branches of the federal government, 2,100 non-profit organizations, private sector interests and over 4 million Americans.” U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Office of National Capital Region Coordination,” fact sheet, August 5, 2003, at www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?theme=43&content=1161 (January 6, 2005).

13. Tom Davis, chairman, opening statement in hearings, *Target Washington: Coordinating Federal Homeland Security Efforts With Local Jurisdictions in the National Capital Region*, Committee on Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives, 108th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 24, 2004, at reform.house.gov/GovReform/Hearings/EventSingle.aspx?EventID=1120 (January 6, 2005).