

# WebMemo



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## Reviewing DHS: The International Dimension of Homeland Security

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Since her confirmation, the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Janet Napolitano, has been working to acquaint herself with the inner workings of DHS while developing her policy priorities for this new Administration. On January 21, she issued the first in a series of directives requiring DHS to provide her with detailed information on the department's programs, such as critical infrastructure protection and disaster response.

The secretary is taking the right approach to her new position by assessing the current state of DHS prior to making recommendations and reforms. However, similar to Napolitano's confirmation hearing, these requests for information do not adequately address the international dimension of homeland security. Keeping Americans safe requires the U.S. to work with America's allies abroad. The secretary should ensure that her policy priorities recognize the important role international cooperation plays in U.S. security efforts, and she should formalize the ability of DHS to promote international cooperation.

**Expanding DHS Role.** Prior to 9/11, responsibility for international cooperation on U.S. national security matters fell primarily on the Department of State, the Department of Defense (DOD), and, to some extent, the FBI and CIA. But after 9/11, DHS has played a critical role in protecting U.S. interests overseas—deploying over 2,000 representatives abroad, a number exceeded only by the State Department.

The role of DHS in the international community has expanded; however, challenges remain. The State Department and DOD, as opposed to DHS, remain largely in control of international assistance programs—which give resources to countries to develop their own security programs, including those that fall in line with DHS mission sets. DHS has done an excellent job expanding the Support Anti-Terrorism by Fostering Effective Technologies (SAFETY) Act, which provides liability protection for homeland security technologies. However, DHS needs to do more to expand these protections around the globe.

Napolitano's confirmation hearing indicated that Congress is heavily focused on security at the northern border—in fact, almost every Senator mentioned the northern border during questioning. But Congress needs to change its strategy and concentrate on other mandates that could jeopardize Americans' security.

**Homeland Security Requires International Cooperation.** Homeland security is truly a global mission. There are three ways in which international cooperation promotes U.S. security:

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm2305.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm2305.cfm)

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1. *Cooperation to Prevent Terrorism.* Contemporary terrorist threats are transnational; virtually every aspect of preventing terrorist attacks has an international dimension. Europe served as a base for recruiting and planning the attacks of 9/11. Terrorists use Latin America for safe havens, recruiting, fundraising, and facilitating international travel. America's homeland security efforts cannot begin at the point where the threat has already arrived in the United States—the U.S. needs strong cooperative relations with foreign countries aimed at securing global systems that connect the U.S. with the rest world, such as commerce, networks, and infrastructure.
2. *Security of America's Allies.* Because of globalization, modern societies are highly interdependent. A terrorist attack that destabilizes one country can have a tremendous impact on U.S. security—including its economic viability. Consequently, sharing best practices for both preventing and responding to acts of terrorism should be a crucial part of DHS international policies.
3. *America's Security Policies Affecting Our Allies.* America's security policies not only have an effect on America's domestic security; these policies also affect our allies. Countries look to the U.S. as a world leader in best security practices. Therefore, the U.S. needs to have a smart, risk-based security strategy at home that can be replicated around the globe. Furthermore, U.S. policies can have a serious impact on the economies and supply chains of our allies. This means that the U.S. must consider the economic effects of new policies both from a domestic and international perspective—keeping the global economy strong.

**Expanding International Partnerships and Programs.** In order to accomplish this global mission, Napolitano should take the following steps to improve and expand upon our international partnerships and programs:

- *Establish DHS Role in International Assistance Programs.* International assistance programs help to promote U.S. interests and build enduring alliances. In addition to money to develop new programs, DHS should be given the legislative authority to set the goals and agendas for

international assistance programs that align with their missions and responsibilities.

- *Expand the Visa Waiver Program.* These Visa Waiver Program's information sharing agreements have enabled the U.S. to gather more information about people traveling to the United States and have increased America's ability to stop threats before they enter the country. Congress and DHS should look for ways to expand this program to additional countries. The additional security information obtained from and given to new member countries will increase the collective security of the U.S. and its allies by helping America to respond to threats in a more timely fashion.
- *Rethink the Northern Border.* Keeping dangerous people and goods out of the U.S. is important. However, spending a lot of money on new security measures at the U.S.–Canadian border is not the best strategy. Instead, the U.S. should seek to increase anti-terrorism cooperation, including information sharing, with Canada. This would preserve the friendship between the U.S. and Canada and make the border more secure without jeopardizing the borders economic benefits—a boon to both the U.S. and Canada.
- *Facilitate International Cooperation on Liability Concerns.* The U.S. cannot counter terrorism without the right technologies. The private sector is often a catalyst for these new tools. However, without liability protection, businesses are reluctant to put these goods on the market—fearing a lawsuit in the event of a terrorist attack. The SAFETY Act does not currently extend to countries located outside of the U.S., many of whom have technologies that could make Americans safer. DHS and the State Department should work with foreign countries to develop similar protections against litigation in these countries.
- *Repeal 100 Percent Scanning.* Congress has mandated 100 percent scanning of shipping containers prior to their entry to the United States. Because these containers are coming from foreign countries, the additional scanning would need to take place at foreign seaports. Not only is this a tremendous logistical problem for America's allies, but blanket scanning is not in line

with the risk-based principles adopted cooperatively by the U.S. and its allies (this effort to institute risk-based screening was largely led by the United States). Such a reversal in policies upsets allies who have invested tremendous resources in improving their security structures. Congress should repeal this mandate.

- *Create a Policy Undersecretary.* The Office of International Affairs at DHS is led by the Office of Policy. Currently, the Office of Policy directorate at DHS is led by an assistant secretary. But given the importance role of international affairs in homeland security and the other long-range strategic planning efforts spearheaded by this directorate, Congress should elevate the leader of the Office of Policy to the secretary level.

It is vital that Napolitano's future plans are representative of this global mission. By working with others, the United States can increase the effectiveness of its anti-terrorism and disaster response efforts. But it can also ensure that America's allies, through information sharing and other forms of cooperation, are also better prepared to handle the terrorist threat—in a way that maintains the sovereignty of the U.S. and its allies.

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