

## Letter to the Editor

Changing Homeland Security: What is Homeland Security?

Dear Dr. Bellavita:

Thank you for your intriguing article “Changing Homeland Security: What is Homeland Security?” in the June edition of *Homeland Security Affairs*. Your use of an “ecosystem” to capture the plethora of homeland security definitions was innovative and helpful.

I served in the Department of Homeland Security from 2005 until recently as the chief of staff to the director of Office of Operations Coordination (Ops). The primary role of the Office is to coordinate interagency operations and planning in support of the Secretary. From my view the challenges and confusion over the definitions and interpretations of homeland security that you described are accurate. Your observation that “semantic entities struggle for resources to sustain themselves” is great inside-the-beltway insight!

While working for DHS I often found myself in the position of describing the purpose and the role of the department to audiences of other federal, state, private, and public sector audiences. My pitch went something like this:

Defining the Role of Secretary: The secretary of the department has four primary roles:

- Carry out the president’s policies.
- Execute the laws passed by Congress.
- Manage the agencies within his/her department.
- Coordinate federal operations to prevent, protect, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks and other man-made/natural disasters.

The first three roles could apply to any cabinet-level secretary; it is the last bullet that differentiates the role of the DHS Secretary and, I would argue, was the primary reason why the department was created.

Defining Homeland Security: How you define homeland security may be a case of where you stand is what you see (or what you believe). To a fire chief and other first responders, homeland security may mean federal grant money to purchase new radios or emergency response equipment; to a CEO of a major corporation it may mean implementing increased security regulations (perhaps with an adverse impact on the bottom line); to a governor or mayor it may mean access to classified threat information from the intelligence community. How DHS and the federal government meet the needs and interests of homeland security partners defines their level of satisfaction with the department and commitment toward “homeland security” (which is often viewed as a “federal” program). Curiously, I found that among “homeland security partners” there is little discussion or appreciation of the “C” word: Coordination.

Coordination, Prevention, Protection, Response, and Recovery: The DHS coordination role is a common thread that runs through the 2002 Homeland Security Act, Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5) and the Homeland Security *National Strategy*. Each document, either implicitly or explicitly, emphasizes the coordination role of the secretary as the principle federal official for domestic incident management.

Prevent What? Prevent terrorist attacks. This is primarily an intelligence and law enforcement function. The National Counter-Terrorism Center coordinates intelligence

from the FBI, CIA, and other members of the national intelligence and law enforcement community. The role of DHS is to disseminate threat information and to coordinate operational responses to mitigate the threat. The threat to the British airlines in 2006 is a good example of how intelligence information was disseminated to the public and private sectors and how TSA worked with airlines to put in place operational responses to counter the threat (in this case liquid explosives that could be concealed as legitimate personal products).

**Protect What?** Protect critical infrastructure and people from terrorist attacks and man-made/natural disasters through a coordinated planning and exercise effort. Given that 85+ percent of the nation's critical infrastructure is owned by the private sector, and that the protection and safety of most citizens is a local law enforcement and emergency response/management function, the federal government's role, as outlined in Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 (HSPD-8), "National Preparedness," describes how the "federal departments and agencies will prepare for such a response, including prevention." Recent changes to HSPD-8 include a planning framework that will be the first step in coordinating and synchronizing strategic, operational, and tactical level plans across all levels of government. Protection and prevention are also enhanced through grant programs and active participation of homeland security partners in national and local exercise and training programs.

**Respond to What?** Respond to natural and man-made disasters (including terrorist attacks). We are all very familiar with FEMA's vital role in emergency management in response to hurricanes, wildfires, floods, and other natural disasters. However the secretary's HSPD-5 role as the domestic incident manager is more inclusive. A year ago, in response to a report of a possible outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease among livestock imported into the U.S., DHS – operating under its HSPD-5 authority – coordinated the interagency planning and operational response among the Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, the White House and other federal agencies. The livestock turned out to be ill with another less-serious disease; nonetheless this and other recent cases have demonstrated that while all forms of emergency management are part of incident management, not all incident management responses involve participation from the emergency response and management community.

**Recover from What?** Recover from short- and long-term consequences. Experience has shown that recovery from another Katrina-size event will take years. The creation of the Gulf Coast Recovery Office suggests that permanent or semi-permanent institutions to manage long-term issues related to housing, benefits, and mitigation might become the norm. In the latest Top Officials (TOPOFF) exercise, participants dealt with the long-term radiation effects from "dirty bombs" detonated in urban areas. Participants found that long-term recovery will involve significant coordination, not only within DHS but also among Department of Energy, Housing and Urban Development, state, local (perhaps international partners), and the scientific community

It is true that "Homeland Security is not the same thing as the Department of Homeland Security." But it is also true that that DHS, other federal, state, local, and tribal governments, and the private sector, in exercising their authorities and interests, conduct homeland security functions. As we continue to better understand the authorities, roles, and responsibilities of the "homeland security community," one day

the meaning of “homeland security” may become intuitively obvious to all. Until then I applaud you for making the discussion more than just a war of words.

Thanks again for an interesting and thought-provoking article.

Sincerely,  
Derek Rieksts,  
Vero Beach, FL

June 26, 2008