

INTRODUCTION

America was stunned by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Prior to this day, the continental United States had enjoyed a certain geographic distance from military conflict for well over one hundred years. The Administration of George W. Bush, in response to these attacks, reinforced national security by instituting tighter controls on immigration and airport security and increasing surveillance of potentially suspect individuals and groups. Another response was the reorganization of government agencies responsible for various aspects of national security. Ultimately, all or parts of 22 federal agencies were combined, bringing together more than 170,000 employees, and pooling a budget of more than 37.5 billion dollars. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created on November 25, 2002, amounting to the largest reorganization of the federal bureaucracy since the beginning of the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> But this reorganization was rushed and politicized, and may not have been optimal for the enhancement of U.S. national security.

HISTORY OF EFFORTS TO REORGANIZE THE NATIONAL-SECURITY BUREAUCRACY

The idea of establishing a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began with the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century, also known as the ‘Hart-Rudman’ Commission, which was chartered in 1998 by William Cohen, President William Clinton’s Secretary of Defense. The commission issued three reports prior to the September 11 attacks.<sup>2</sup> In the commission’s second report, issued on April 15, 2000, the commission warned: “In light of the new dangers arising from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism, the United States must focus anew on how to maintain a robust and powerful deterrent to all forms of attack on its territory and its critical assets.”<sup>3</sup> In its third report, issued seven months before the attacks, the commission wrote: “The United States is today very poorly organized to design and implement any comprehensive strategy to protect the homeland. The assets and organizations that now exist for homeland security are scattered across more than two dozen departments and agencies, and all fifty states.”<sup>4</sup> The Hart-Rudman commission concluded that the President and Congress should create “a National Homeland Security Agency (NHSA) with responsibility for planning, coordinating, and integrating various U.S. government activities involved in homeland security.”<sup>5</sup>

The Bush administration, however, failed to take these conclusions and recommendations into consideration until the horrendous shock of September 11, 2001. Efforts after September 11 were in one important respect too late, and efforts to prevent further attacks were also rushed, due partly to the delayed attention to the issues raised by the Hart-Rudman Commission.

CREATING AN ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGE: THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

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ESTABLISHING THE CABINET-LEVEL DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

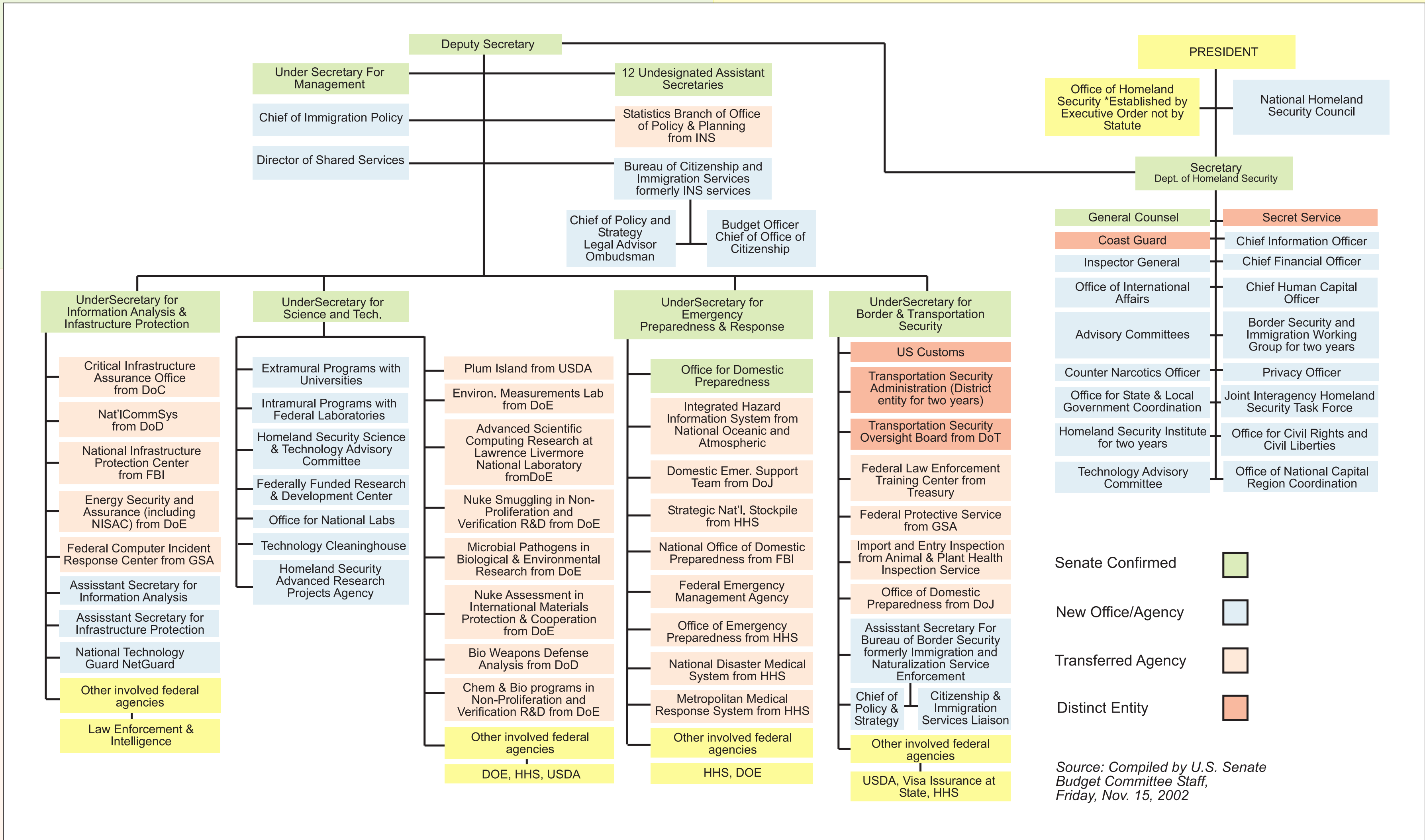
After September 11, the Bush Administration followed some of the advice of the Hart-Rudman Commission by issuing an executive order to establish an Office of Homeland Security, a President's Homeland Security Advisory Council, and four senior advisory committees for homeland security.

The initiative of creating a *cabiner*-level department for homeland security originated in Congress when a bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced a bill to create such a department and expand the responsibilities of the advisory council’s leader and make that leader accountable to Congress. The Bush administration resisted this change. Eventually, in May 2002, the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee approved its own bill (S. 2452) to create a cabinet-level Department of National Homeland Security.

The Bush administration then decided to create a department that would be far broader than what Congress had in mind. The President’s plan called for the new department to include large federal agencies such as the Coast Guard, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Customs Service, the Border Patrol, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Secret Service, and the Transportation Security Administration, as well as selected functions of other cabinet agencies. The plan was supposed to yield new efficiencies by eliminating duplication and forcing better cross-department communication. It also called for giving the new department sufficient authority and funding to monitor security threats while providing “a coherent, coordinated effort to identify hostile agents and interrupt intended threats.”<sup>6</sup>

The Bush administration’s ambitious plan for consolidation involved a very large array of participants and interests. Many of those interests conflicted, and the competition between interests at times overshadowed national security concerns. Many discussions focused on issues such as budget overruns, personnel, and the department’s scope of authority. In the end, the new department absorbed 22 existing federal agencies involved in border security, bioterrorism defenses and disaster management.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY



Adapted from *Government Executive*, 2002.

CREATING AN ORGANIZATION—OR ORGANIZING BOXES?

Creating an organization requires attention not only to structure, but also to strategy, systems, skills, staff, styles and values.<sup>6</sup> For most members of Congress, as it turned out, the problem was not how to adopt new strategies of interaction and feedback that would lead to improvements in the collection, synthesis, and analysis of intelligence among existing organizations, but how to organize the new department.

Without question, it is a very challenging responsibility for a national bureaucracy to reduce the vulnerabilities of an open society. But merely consolidating numerous agencies under the umbrella of one large department could not be, and indeed was not, a policy panacea.<sup>7</sup>

*The natural instinct of those schooled in twentieth century bureaucracy would be to try and organize boxes into a comprehensible hierarchy. But reorganizing these boxes into one box would not solve the essential problem. . . . Homeland security . . . does not fit into one box and it does not lend itself to traditional bureaucratic government. . . the problems of the 21st century will not fit into the bureaucratic boxes of the 20th century.*<sup>8</sup>

-E. Karmarck

Centralization was seen as a way to eliminate bureaucratic fragmentation and to coordinate efforts within a comprehensive system of national security.<sup>9</sup> But it was dangerously unwise to begin a process of reform that called for a unified structure without an appreciation of the potential costs and risks of centralization.<sup>1</sup> Moving agencies together under the DHS does not necessarily foster integration and coordination. Such centralization could instead promote redundancy and undermine collective efforts. Another risk posed by centralization is that important intelligence information could be lost or overlooked precisely because the bureaucratic structure of a single Department of Homeland Security is so large and complicated.

CONCLUSIONS

In the rush to create a new federal bureaucracy to protect national security, the protection of national security has not been the only concern, and may even have been compromised. The rationality of the policymaking involved in reorganizing national security efforts has been limited by time constraints and bureaucratic politics, in addition to the complexities of the security risks. The Bush administration’s strategy of constructing an enormous centralized bureaucracy was not informed by much of the relevant scholarship on national security or on bureaucracy.

The most important policy lesson to be learned from the crafting of the Homeland Security Act is that an attempt to fundamentally reform the national-security bureaucracy demands more than re-organizing boxes or centralizing the bureaucracy. If these strategies are part of the solution, they are at most only a beginning. The effective and timely sharing of accurate information among the various security agencies requires a less bureaucratic organizational style in order to prevent redundancy, competition, confusion, and inflexibility. Because the Department of Homeland Security faces such obstacles, its strategies for protecting homeland security must include a continual critical assessment of its own organizational principles.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> D.T. Stuart, *Ministry of Fear*, p. 293  
<sup>2</sup> D.T. Stuart, *Ministry of Fear*, p. 307  
<sup>3</sup> The United States Commission on National Security/21st Century, Phase II Report, p. 8  
<sup>4</sup> The United States Commission on National Security/21st Century, Phase III Report, p. 10  
<sup>5</sup> The United States Commission on National Security/21st Century, p. 15  
<sup>6</sup> M.B. Donley and N.A. Pollard, “Organizing for National Security,” p. 140  
<sup>7</sup> The U.S. Congress, “Transforming the Federal Government to Protect America from Terrorism,” p. 6  
<sup>8</sup> E. Karmarck, “Applying 21st-Century Government to the Challenge of Homeland Security,” p. 4  
<sup>9</sup> B.B. Stubbs, “Fitting In”

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