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Missing Pieces in Homeland Security: Interagency Education, Assignments, and Professional Accreditation

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In the wake of 9/11, Congress created the Department of Homeland Security not just to integrate the activities of over two dozen agencies and programs, but also to lead a national effort of federal, state, and local government as well as nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. Yet building a core of homeland security professionals—the most important initiative in making the enterprise a success—has hardly begun. The Administration can and must address this shortfall. Homeland security needs the foundation of a professional development system that will provide the cadre of leaders required to meet the demands of the 21st century.

The Right Stuff. Homeland security is a new core competence of government. The professionals that lead the effort must have three essential skills:

- Familiarity with a number of diverse security-related disciplines (such as health care, law enforcement, immigration, and trade) and practice in interagency operations, working with different government agencies, the private sector, and international partners;
- Competence in crisis action and long-term strategic planning; and
- A sound understanding of federalism, the free-market economy, constitutional rights, and international relations.

Today, however, few individuals in government have all of the skills needed to lead the homeland security enterprise. The White House's after-action report on the national response to Hurricane Katrina, for example, highlighted the shortfalls in the government's ability to manage large-scale interagency homeland security operations.

Lessons Learned. The U.S. military faced similar professional development challenges in building a cadre of joint leaders—officers competent in multi-service operations involving two or more of the armed services. The Goldwater–Nichols Act of 1986 mandated a solution that required officers to have a mix of joint education, assignments, and accreditation by a board of professionals in order to be eligible for promotion to general officer rank. Goldwater–Nichols is widely credited with the successes in joint military operations from Desert Storm to the war on terrorism.

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- Today, few individuals in government have all of the skills needed to lead the homeland security enterprise.
 - Building a core of homeland security professionals has hardly begun. The Administration can and must address this shortfall.
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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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Foundations for Homeland Security. Education, assignment, and accreditation are tools that can be applied to developing professionals for homeland security and other critical interagency national security activities.

Education. A program of education, assignment, and accreditation that cuts across all levels of government and the private sector with national and homeland security responsibilities has to start with professional schools specifically designed to teach interagency skills. No suitable institutions exist in Washington, academia, or elsewhere. The government will have to establish them. They should include:

- A government “brick and mortar” national/homeland security university co-located with existing facilities at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C.;
- A U.S. Coast Guard senior service college established as part of the university and equivalent to the other service war colleges;
- A short-term elite interagency “planning” school; and
- A year-long continuing education initiative similar to the Defense Department’s Seminar XXI program.

While the resident and non-resident programs of many university and government schools and training centers can and should play a part in homeland security and interagency education, these institutions should form the taproot of a national effort with national standards.

Assignment. Qualification will also require interagency assignments in which individuals can practice and hone their skills. These assignments should be at the “operational” level where leaders learn how to make things happen, not just set policies. Identifying the right organizations and assignments and ensuring that they are filled by promising leaders should be a priority. These assignments could include:

- Existing activities like the Joint Interagency Task Forces that direct drug interdictions in the Gulf and along the Pacific coast of North America. They are a model of effective intelligence sharing and operational coordination.

- New organizations that are needed not just to provide a training ground for homeland security professionals, but also to address the current shortfalls in national and homeland security operations, such as those in regional homeland security offices, which are required to be established by the Homeland Security Act of 2002.

Accreditation. Accreditation and congressional involvement are crucial to ensuring that programs are successful and sustainable. Before leaders are selected for critical (non-politically appointed) positions in national and homeland security, they should be accredited by a board of professionals in accordance with broad guidelines established by Congress. Congress should:

- Require creation of boards that (1) establish educational requirements and accredit institutions that are needed to teach national security and homeland security, (2) screen and approve individuals to attend schools and fill interagency assignments, and (3) certify individuals as interagency-qualified leaders.
- Establish congressional committees in the House and Senate with narrow jurisdictions over key education, assignment, and accreditation interagency programs, including homeland security.

The Clock Is Ticking. Critical components of good governance, like establishing long-term professional programs, are often shunted aside as important but not pressing—something to be done later. But later never comes. This is unacceptable for homeland security and other critical national security activities that require building interagency competencies that are not broadly extant in government. The Administration and Congress have time to address this issue and help to make Americans safer for generations.

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