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New Homeland Security Strategy Misses the Mark

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In the wake of 9/11, the Administration published a strategy for keeping the nation safe, free, and prosperous in the face of the threat of transnational terrorism. As the nation's first homeland security strategy, it was not bad. It respected the principle of federalism and other constitutional imperatives; fostered a notion of shared responsibility between all levels of government, the private sector, and individual citizens; recognized the necessity of cooperating with friends and allies around the world; and called for new, enduring programs to effectively combat terrorism.

This week, the White House published a new version of the strategy that obfuscates rather than clarifies the government's homeland security mission. Instead of promulgating a new approach, which is largely unnecessary, the Administration and Congress should continue the strategy of strengthening the national instruments needed to combat terrorism while encouraging economic growth and protecting individual constitutional liberties.

More Misses Than Hits. In light of the new strategy's shortcomings, policymakers must remember the following:

- **Natural disasters are not national security issues.** The new strategy places undue emphasis on responding to natural disasters. The federal government does have responsibilities in this area, and use of homeland security instruments like the Coast Guard and the National Guard is appropriate in disaster response efforts. However, hurricanes are not national security threats.

Treating them as such threatens to cede greater power and authority to the executive branch. The expanded emphasis on natural disasters in the revised strategy was a knee-jerk reaction to criticism over the response to Katrina rather than a necessary change in strategic focus. The original homeland security strategy stressed that national disaster systems should be structured to respond to "all hazards," both natural and man-made. That strategic guidance was sufficient.

- **Domestic radicalization is a domestic problem.** The initial strategy emphasized that the purpose of homeland security was to combat transnational terrorism. The new strategy places emphasis on the threat of domestic radicalization. Dealing with all forms of domestic terrorism—from eco-terrorism to an al-Qaeda wannabe—is certainly a national responsibility. However, it is less certain that conflating all threats (whether they have an international affiliation or not) under the umbrella of a homeland security strategy is a good idea. Like the emphasis on natural disasters, this change in the homeland security strategy could eventually turn purely domestic public safety and criminal issues

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into national security concerns, leading to an overly intrusive federal role in domestic affairs.

- **Federalism must take center stage.** The original strategy placed a strong emphasis on shared responsibility, particularly on the importance of burden-sharing. In many areas, state and local governments and the private sector should bear the lion's share of leadership and responsibility for homeland security. The revised strategy downplays the critical importance of federalism.

Description Is Not Strategy. Much of the new strategy is merely a catalogue explaining and justifying ongoing government programs, rather than real strategic guidance pointing the way forward.

Also, some new additions suggest a troubling over-nationalization of homeland security. With its remaining time on office, the Administration should emphasize realistic expectations of what the federal government can reasonably accomplish and should focus its energy on effectively implementing existing initiatives.

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