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Trends. For Homeland Security, Against a Department of Homeland Security

Editor

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Abstract: This article discusses national security as well as the addition of a new department – the Department of Homeland Security – as a psychological and political tactic.

In the aftermath of what is now referred to as 9/11--a semiotic that ineluctably stimulates projection, differential contamination of cognition by affect, the corporate lust to make a buck, and solipsistic strivings for self-advancement--public discourse in Washington, DC (and throughout the United States [US] concerning the public discourse of Washington, DC) largely is focusing on what a new cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security would look like. Advocacy and dialectic focus on which security-related agencies should be in the Department and which should be out. Organizational questions abound as to the identity of the incipient Department secretary, the size of the budget, and the actual costs of reorganization of Government. Other Issues comprise the quest for corporate liability for divulging sensitive, security-related information to the Government; the protection or lack thereof of labor rules for Department personnel; and the transferring of money among Department agencies without Congressional validation.

One can make a strong case, however, that a new Department would do little to significantly advance US homeland security and could even threaten it through a misallocation of resources. This is because necessary homeland security initiatives--such as more cooperation between law enforcement and intelligence entities; facilitation of accurate, responsive, and secure information transmission; upgrading of an intelligence analytic fusion center; delineation of more appropriate public safety and public health; development and implementation of novel education and training modules concerning emergency and crisis management; and construction of a more integrated first-responder capability--are not being impeded by existing governmental infrastructure.

The new Department initiative is largely a political tactic to seize partisan electoral advantage, a well-meaning but flawed attempt to reassure the general public, and an exemplification of magical thinking about bureaucratic innovation as a show of resolve and muscle that spontaneously transfigures into operational savvy, eliciting despair in US terrorist adversaries. This psychology will surely be exploited by terrorist and other enemies of the US--foreign and domestic. In essence, then, the psychology of crisis response is largely ensuring further crisis. Although the US has often exemplified the zenith of organizational success, this time its organizational penchant rivals egregious self-injurious behavior. (See Grote, D. (2000). Public sector organizations: Today's innovative leaders in performance management. *Public Personnel Management*, 29, 1-20; Lewis, J. M., & Considine, M. (1999). Medicine, economics and agenda-setting. *Social Science & Medicine*, 48, 393-405; Oliver, S. (2000). Symmetrical communication: Does reality support rhetoric? *Corporate Communications*, 5, 26-33; Smithson, A.E. (July 15, 2002). One federal department too many. *The New York Times*, p. A21.) (Keywords: Crisis Response, Department of Homeland Security, Governmental Structure, National Security.)