HOMELAND SECURITY: INTELLIGENCE AND WARNING

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Abstract

The intent of this research paper is to evaluate how the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) office of intelligence and warning are currently postured. It will also provide an assessment of key areas that still need improvement. As a watch officer, assigned to The White House during September 11, 2001, personal experience will justify some points in this paper. Since that day, the President created and shouldered the responsibility of protecting our country on the Department of Homeland Security. It is crucial that DHS employees are right 100% of the time because if they are not our way of life could drastically change in the blink of an eye.
Outline

I. Intelligence and Warning
   A. Explain the current Intelligence capabilities within Department of Homeland Security (DHS).
      1. What is Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC)?
      2. What is the Terrorist Threat Integration Center (TTIC)?
      3. How can shortfalls within the Intelligence area be improved?
   B. Explain the current warning capabilities within DHS
      1. What is Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS)?
      2. Explanation of the color-coded threat levels.
      3. What is threat advisory?
   C. How can shortfalls within the warning area be improved?
Homeland Security

The attacks of September 11, 2001, were a wake up call to the United States government. They revealed that America did not have an agency that collectively postured the organizations and people inside the United States borders. As a result, in 2002 President Bush’s administration created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The administration defined six essential missions in order for the newly formed department to function properly. The first, and I believe the most critical, of the six missions assigned to DHS is intelligence and warning.

Intelligence

Intelligence and warning is the department’s ability to collect and digest actionable intelligence and disseminate proper warnings to the federal, state, local, and private sectors in a timely manner. This is not a new concept, however the United States government never mandated federal, state, and local agencies to share information between each other. The responsibility to develop and implement this plan fell directly on the new Director of DHS, Governor Tom Ridge (Maxwell, 2004.) Secretary Ridge developed the Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC). The HSOC is the collection and assessment point for raw and digested data that is pushed and/or pulled into the operations center from other federal agencies as-well-as pushed upward from state and local departments. It is important to note that DHS has made a lot of positive headway in the development of their new agency, however there are still key areas that require improvement. One critical area that needs immediate attention is the area of reporting procedures to and from DHS, particularly the HSOC. This process includes delineation of authority with respect to intelligence decisions as it pertains to the increased
and/or decreased warning levels. Currently DHS, specifically the HSOC, is charged by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to be the focal point for intelligence and the place where a decision is made for a warning to be disseminated (Carafano, 2002.) However, the Terrorist Threat Integration Center (TTIC) is the collection and assessment point for all intelligence information used to make the decision on what warning posture to announce (Carafano, 2002.) A major issue here is that the HSOC and the TTIC Operations Centers are not centrally located. Additionally, the TTIC answers to the Director of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), not DHS. Even though the CIA is technically subordinate to DHS with respect to intelligence gathering and warning decision-making, with current organizational set up it is directly opposite. The easiest way to resolve the issue is to make the TTIC answer to the Director of Homeland Security instead of the CIA. Of course, the CIA would still have operational control over the TTIC, but the DHS lines of authority would be clear for reporting procedures. Governmental agencies need to remember that the safety of the American people should be paramount to their desire to maintain control over their agency. The United States’ goal should to be specific, timely, and actionable intelligence shared across the spectrum of governmental agencies. It is my assessment that we are still not there yet.

Warning

Timely and appropriate warning is the result of actionable intelligence. It is essential that DHS evaluates the intelligence correctly so that federal, state, and local agencies along with the American people can receive the proper warning. In order to achieve this directive, DHS developed a graduating five step color-coded system called the Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS.) The HSAS system acts much like the military’s Defense Conditions (DEFCON) levels that were devised during the Cold War and are still in use today (Nguyen,
It is designed to guide preset protective measures when creditable information is received to either a geographic region or particular sector of the economy (Carafano, 2002.) According to the Homeland Security Presidential Directive-3 (2002), issued by The White House, the five color-coded levels are:

Low Condition (Green) - This is the first level and is declared when there is a low risk of terrorist attacks.

Guarded Condition (Blue) - This is the second level and is declared when there is a general risk of terrorist attacks.

Elevated Condition (Yellow) – This is the third level and is declared when there is a significant risk of terrorist attacks.

High Condition (Orange) – This is the fourth level and is declared when there is a high risk of terrorist attacks.

Severe Condition (Red) – This is the fifth level and is reflects a severe risk of terrorist attacks.

When required the HSOC publishes Homeland Security Threat Advisories. While these advisories may not cause a change in the current threat level, they do include sanitized information which informs “need-to-know” agencies and people about a pending incident or threat. Advisories are meant to inform federal, state, and local governments, private sector organizations, and our international partners (Carafano, 2002.)

Improvement to the threat color-coded system program should be addressed. At the federal level the system is positive and works well, however, once you look at the lower levels the system reveals problems. One major issue is the ability for local governments to fund additional requirements once the threat level is raised. Some towns might be postured to high and
wasting limited resources while other towns might not be doing anything at all (Nguyen, 2004.) There seems to be a lack of standard. More importantly state and local officials do not seem to be getting enough information when a Homeland Security Threat Advisories are issued. It is necessary to allow these local governments to make their own assessment as to what additional measures are required to be put in place. In order to resolve to this issue more information should be placed in the advisory without alerting the attackers. I admit it is a balancing act but it is necessary for the system to work.

Over the past five years, Department of Homeland Security has made considerable progress in protecting our country from another attack. We will all concede that processes and procedures can always be improved, DHS is no different. It is a known fact that Al-Qaeda’s planning cycle for a major attack is seven-to-ten years. It has been six years since September 11, 2001. I am not insinuating that DHS has not been tested because there have been several terrorist plots in recent years, fortunately foiled due to the hard work of the DHS employees. However, the underlying issue is will we be ready for the next major attack or will the country be complacent and ignore the indicators.
References


Carafano (2002)


Maxwell (2004)


from http://www.heritage.org