Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. REPORT DATE	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED
MAR 2004		**-**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
Coordinating the War on Terrorism	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **Rand Corp,1700 Main St,Santa Monica,CA,90407**	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
see report

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			
unclassified	**unclassified**	**unclassified**		**23**	

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OCCASIONAL
PAPER

Coordinating the War on Terrorism

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OP-110-RC

March 2004

Prepared for the RAND Corporation

This research in the public interest was supported by RAND, using discretionary funds made possible by the generosity of RAND's donors, the fees earned on client-funded research, and independent research and development (IR&D) funds provided by the Department of Defense.

ISBN: 0-8330-3577-0

Published 2004 by the RAND Corporation
1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138
1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050
201 North Craig Street, Suite 202, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-1516
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Preface

The war on terrorism presents the United States with new and distinct challenges in coordinating many different diplomatic, intelligence, and military activities both at home and overseas. This Occasional Paper addresses the questions of why coordination is important and how it should be accomplished within the executive branch of the federal government. The paper concludes with a vision for a White House coordinating process and for the shape of the newly created Terrorist Threat Integration Center.

This paper results from the RAND Corporation's continuing program of self-sponsored independent research. Support for such research is provided, in part, by donors and by the independent research and development provisions of RAND's contracts for the operation of its U.S. Department of Defense federally funded research and development centers.

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Coordinating the War on Terrorism

Introduction

The war on terrorism has changed Americans' lives and strained the capacities of their government. The federal government confronts a confounding array of choices about priorities and coordination. Although the Cold War required synchronizing America's global anticommunist campaign, the war on terrorism presents several new and distinct challenges to coordination.

The new war calls on the panoply of instruments within the federal government—from military action to law enforcement, from intelligence to diplomacy. Each of the main government departments (Homeland Security, State, Justice, Defense, Treasury) has a major role, but none can succeed on its own, and the number of agencies involved in aspects of counterterrorism is large and growing. The war also requires the federal government to reach out to state and local governments at home and to governments abroad. Another challenge is that the war on terrorism involves many agencies not just in making policy but also in implementing it, so coordination needs to extend into operations. In the past, a single agency tended to have the clear lead. Now, though, military operations in Afghanistan involve Central Intelligence (CIA) operators and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents; and negotiations with foreign governments and their liaison services cannot be the purview of the State Department, CIA, or the FBI alone. The war also engages intelligence agencies as operators abroad—not just passive collectors or analysts—to a degree not seen since the Vietnam War.

What is distinctly new for the U.S. government is the need to coordinate across foreign and domestic counterterrorism activities—the "foreign-domestic divide"—in ways that were not demanded by the threats of the Cold War. Finally, the possibility that terrorists might attack at any time means that coordination may need to be instant, perhaps involving preemptive operations that could take place both at home and abroad. These attacks or operations would invoke the highest stakes for senior officials, including the President, and they would occur in the full glare of media attention.

This Occasional Paper addresses the question of how the war on terrorism should be coordinated within the executive branch of the federal government, in particular within the

The authors would like to thank Steve Simon for help in understanding how the National Security Council counterterrorism process worked in the past, Chad Yost for his research assistance, and Angel Rabasa for his careful and thoughtful review of an earlier draft of this paper. Thanks as well to this who shepherded it through the publication process: Joe Fisher, Miriam Polon, and Claudia McCowan.

White House. "Coordination" is a word more used than understood in government. Here, it means employing processes to ensure that the perspectives and activities of different departments and agencies are known by all; that their activities are not duplicative but form an integrated and coherent set of policies, programs, and operations that serve the President's goals; and that decisions are made when more than one agency or department must agree. Viewed another way, the answer "why coordinate?" is that if decisions or actions are left to individual departments operating separately, there will be the risk of mistakes, lost opportunities, policies at odds with one another, or actions that diverge from the President's goals.

The paper begins by surveying the historical record and then lays out the critical choices. The final choices of any particular administration will depend on its distinct personalities and style, but we conclude with a vision for a White House coordinating process and for one critical particular—the shape of the newly created Terrorist Threat Integration Center (TTIC).

The Record of Coordination

Coordinating federal agencies in combating terrorism has challenged every presidential administration since the early 1970s. The forms of coordination, however, have varied with the intensity of the perceived threat and the styles of administrations. A series of dramatic terrorist crimes, most notably the murder of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, ushered in the era of modern international terrorism.[1] Policymakers recognized that the instruments of counterterrorism, such as hostage negotiations, intelligence cooperation, and international legal regimes, were linked and thus required the Departments of State, Justice, and Defense, and the CIA, to work together continuously and coherently.

Modern counterterrorism strategy began to take shape during the Nixon and Ford administrations, when coordinating counterterrorism fell to a cabinet-level committee chaired by the Secretary of State.[2] A working group below cabinet level was created to address issues that were considered important but not yet critical, such as aircraft security and visa reform. International agreements to combat terror, such as the 1971 Organization of American States convention against terrorism directed against diplomats, were put in place; and cooperation in international law enforcement, in particular through Interpol, was intensified. However, the level of the threat did not make terrorism urgent business for senior officials, and the cabinet-committee structure lapsed into ineffectiveness.[3]

Key changes in coordination introduced during the Carter administration have remained central to America's counterterrorism strategy to this day. In particular, the cabinet committee on terrorism was abolished, and instead, the National Security Council (NSC)

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[1] For a useful account of early responses to international terrorism, see David Tucker, *Skirmishes at the Edge of Empire: The United States and International Terrorism* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1997), chapter 1.

[2] "President Nixon Establishes Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism," Department of State Bulletin, October 23. 1972, p. 475.

[3] Tucker, pp. 13–14.

was given responsibility for coordination, with "lead agency" roles for responding to incidents abroad and at home assigned, respectively, to the State Department and the FBI.[4]

Counterterrorism became an urgent presidential priority for the first time during the Reagan administration. In the view of the White House, terrorists sponsored by the Soviet Union and its satellite countries were "waging a war against not only the United States, but all civilized society."[5] To counter the threat, the United States was required to employ all of its "diplomatic, economic, legal, military, paramilitary, covert action, and informational assets."[6] Wielding these instruments to maximum effect required careful and regular coordination. Toward that end, the White House established a variety of new administrative bodies, including a relatively small standing interagency committee that met frequently to exchange information, develop new approaches, and support higher-level NSC "principals."

The first Bush administration retained this structure, although, with the end of the Cold War and the perception that international terrorism no longer posed a major threat, counterterrorism dropped in priority on the policy agenda.[7] As a result, the State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism took over interagency coordinating responsibility, a state of affairs that continued until the mid-1990s. In 1995 President Clinton revived the NSC coordinating role and formed the "Coordinating Sub-Group of the Deputies" for counterterrorism, which later became known as the Counterterrorism Security Group, or CSG. To enable quick decisions, the core members of this CSG were reduced to the State Department, Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Justice Department, the FBI, and the CIA, with participation at the Under Secretary or Assistant Secretary level.

Within the NSC staff, responsibility for counterterrorism was first placed in an office with responsibility for other global issues as well, but the office was later separated out to be responsible for counterterrorism consequence management, critical infrastructure protection, crime, and counter-narcotics. In the wake of congressional pressure to create a position for terrorism akin to the "drug czar," the director of the office was given the title National Coordinator for Security, Critical Infrastructure and Counter-Terrorism to raise the profile of these issues. From this platform, the National Coordinator expanded his agenda to include assembling integrated threat assessments and the overall counterterrorism budget.

President Bush initially reconstituted the Counter-Terrorism Security Group—along with other interagency working groups on critical infrastructure, weapons of mass destruction preparedness, and consequence management—as the NSC Principals Committee on Counter-Terrorism and National Preparedness.[8] But the September 11 attacks drove the creation of new processes within the executive branch to coordinate the surge in counterterrorism activities. The President established the Homeland Security Council (HSC) with responsibility for "advising and assisting the President with respect to all aspects of homeland

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[4] Anthony C.E. Quainton, "Terrorism: Do Something! But What?" Department of State Bulletin, September 1979, pp. 62–63.

[5] The White House, "National Security Decision Directive [NSDD] 179: Task Force on Combatting Terrorism," July 20, 1985, p. 1.

[6] The White House, "NSDD 207: The National Program for Combatting Terrorism," January 20, 1986, p. 3.

[7] Laura K. Donohue, "In the Name of National Security: U.S. Counterterrorist Measures, 1960–2000, Discussion Paper 2001-6, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, August 2001, p. 39.

[8] See the White House, "National Security Presidential Directive-1," February 13, 2001.

security" and to serve as the "mechanism for ensuring coordination of homeland-security-related activities of executive departments and agencies and effective development and implementation of homeland security policies." He also designated an Assistant to the President for Homeland Security.[9]

At the same time, the NSC retained responsibility for combating terrorism overseas. A National Director/Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism was created, with a mandate to address global terrorism. The Director is a member of the NSC staff, reporting to the Assistant to the President for National Security and also—"with respect to matters relating to global terrorism inside the U.S."—to the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security. As a result, various HSC and NSC policy coordinating committees now handle, respectively, domestic and overseas counterterrorism policies.

After these new White House counterterrorism coordinating structures were put in place, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created to bring under one roof most of the domestic agencies and offices responsible for homeland security, including border and transportation security, and emergency preparedness and response, as well as those involved in protecting the nation's infrastructure. By statute, the new department has the primary mission to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States, reduce the vulnerability of the United States to terrorism, and minimize the damage and assist in the recovery from terrorist attacks that occur within the United States (Public Law 107-296, Title I, Sec. 101). At the same time, the statute is explicit in leaving responsibility for investigating and prosecuting acts of terrorism with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

In response to the criticisms leveled by congressional investigators against the intelligence community for its failure to share information internally in the months leading up to September 11, the President created the Terrorist Threat Integration Center to assemble and analyze terrorist-related information collected both at home and abroad. It is composed of elements of DHS, the FBI's Counterterrorism Division (CTD), the Director of Central Intelligence's (DCI's) Counterterrorist Center (CTC), and the Department of Defense (DoD). The head of TTIC reports to the DCI.[10]

Finally, all U.S. combatant commands responded to the September 11 terrorist attacks by setting up a joint counterterrorism cell within their headquarters. These groups are known as Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACGs), except in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), where the group is known as the Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF). Their mission is to strengthen interagency coordination and the sharing of information between civilian and military agencies in the respective commander's area of responsibility.

Framing the Coordination Challenges

Although the White House processes for coordinating counterterrorism have been in place for more than two years, they have not resolved the fundamental challenge of coordination—how the task should be structured in the White House. Nor is it clear how DHS and

[9] See the White House, "Executive Order 13228," October 8, 2001. Homeland security was defined to cover "efforts to detect, prepare for, prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks within the United States."

[10] See the White House, "Fact Sheet: Strengthening Intelligence to Better Protect America," January 28, 2003.

TTIC will fit, or should fit, into the broader patterns of coordination. And other challenges to coordination exist, especially how to handle terrorism-related intelligence and how to manage the foreign-domestic intelligence divide.

How can presidential oversight be ensured without swamping White House capacities?

Strong pressures conspire to increase the role of the White House in coordinating counterterrorism. So many agencies are involved, and counterterrorism brings together domestic and national security agencies with little experience of working together. Policies and operations depend on intelligence from both foreign and domestic sources. Counterterrorism is laden with political sensitivity—not just when crises occur but also while preparing the nation. Any new major terrorist attack would provoke questions not only about why defenses failed but also about what actions should have been taken to avoid disaster. So political oversight is important for the President all the time, not just when something happens or goes wrong.

However, there are costs to moving most coordinating responsibilities to the White House. The White House staff is not accountable to Congress and American people, only the President is. Moreover, that staff is small compared with the rest of the government. So the question becomes which policy coordination responsibilities should be maintained in the White House and which should be devolved to the departments and agencies and, if so, for what types of activities?

One familiar approach would have the White House coordinate policy decisions but return responsibility for implementing them to the departments. Yet such a divide between policy and operations has always been hard to achieve in practice, and all the more so for counterterrorism. The line separating the two is inherently fuzzy, and the political sensitivities extend to how the policy is implemented. Moreover, few agencies trust another department or agency to reflect their interests and perspectives fairly in their operations.

Another approach would devolve responsibility at each end of the spectrum of counterterrorism actions. At one end—military operations—DoD would be in the lead, while at the other end of the spectrum—domestic consequence management—DHS would be in the lead.

The statute establishing DHS implied such a devolution by giving the Secretary responsibility for providing the federal government's response and coordinating other federal response resources in the event of a terrorist attack or major disaster (Title V, Sec. 502). However, the creation of DHS still left the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security "as the official primarily responsible for advising and assisting the President in the coordination of domestic incident management activities of all departments and agencies in the event of a terrorist threat, and during and in the aftermath of terrorist attacks, major disasters, or other emergencies, within the United States."[11]

Devolving responsibility for military operations to DoD would confront the historically difficult question of whether it or the CIA should take the lead in "military" operations conducted by intelligence agencies, such as those involving CIA's *Predator* drones in Afghanistan and Iraq. The political sensitivity of those operations means that other senior officials, such as the Secretary of State and Attorney General, may also claim a role—thus again invoking the need for White House coordination.

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[11] See the White House, "Executive Order Amendment of Executive Orders, and Other Actions, in Connection with the Transfer of Certain Functions to the Secretary of Homeland Security," February 28, 2003.

Still another approach to devolution would differentiate between crises and day-to-day activities. The White House would retain the coordinating responsibility for the former but devolve it to the departments and agencies for the latter. *Crises* would include both events, such as terrorist attacks and hostage takings, and specific U.S. operations, such as covert intelligence activities or the use of military force. Obviously, whether an event constituted a crisis would be the President's decision, but the goal would be to keep the definition as narrow as possible. Where the departments and agencies had the lead, the White House staff could still be represented to ensure that the interests of all were represented and to assume the role of honest broker as the last resort.

How should requests to foreign governments be coordinated and ranked in relation to other U.S. policies?

The war on terrorism has multiplied America's need for help from foreign governments in finding and seizing terrorists, protecting American embassies and citizens overseas, obtaining overflight rights, and so on. Making sense of these requests is more difficult in the case of counterterrorism because no single individual oversees the government's interactions at home or abroad. Abroad, the U.S. ambassador to a particular country is supposed to know about the activities of all U.S. government agencies in that country, including the CIA Chief of Station, the FBI legal attaché, and the military attachés, but is not in a position to prioritize requests to the host government. In Washington, foreign government and U.S. government officials in various departments often deal directly with each other, often leaving others out of the loop.

At home, the White House staff is the one place in the government with a broad perspective, but the individual White House offices and coordinating processes tend to represent the priorities of their particular responsibility—counterterrorism, nonproliferation, and so on. So even in the White House, no government-wide view prevails. The sheer number of requests involved in the war on terrorism makes it difficult to take every one up to the Assistants to the President for National Security and Homeland Security for review and ranking, and even at that level the division between overseas and domestic activities persists. Should these requests be coordinated and then ranked in relation to other U.S. policies? If so, how? Any process will need to be rapid if it is to meet the requirement of many counterterrorism operations.

Should domestic counterterrorism intelligence collection be coordinated through a White House–led interagency process?

Domestic intelligence collection is a new and very sensitive part of the war on terrorism. After the investigations of intelligence abuses in the 1970s, Congress passed the Foreign Intelligence and Surveillance Act (FISA), which created the Foreign Intelligence and Surveillance Court (FISC) to approve covert searches and wiretaps in the United States for purposes of national security—as opposed to law enforcement. During the Cold War, FISA searches were mostly directed against those who might be spying for foreign powers in the United States, and FISA received little public attention.

Now, however, the war on terrorism has vastly expanded FISA's writ. The nation needs not only to track potential law breakers but also to know the chatter on the streets and

in the mosques of American cities.[12] As a result, two somewhat contradictory concerns about FISA have arisen. One is that its standard for collecting intelligence is still too restrictive, even after being loosened by the USA Patriot Act of November 2001. The other is that FISA will be abused because it is now easier to obtain approval for a national security wiretap than for a law enforcement wiretap, which requires probable cause that a crime has been committed.

The process for FISA requests originates within the FBI, generally by agents on a target-of-opportunity basis. The FBI and Justice's Office of Intelligence Policy and Review review the requests. CIA officials are involved, and the NSC has also been informed at times if surveillance pertained to terrorist suspects. The perspectives of the State Department and others are not introduced into the FISA review process. Should the White House assume responsibility for coordinating a broader review process? How widely should the information collected be shared?

How should intelligence analysis and collection be coordinated across the foreign-domestic divide?

After September 11, U.S. intelligence faced particularly strong criticism for the uneven sharing of information among foreign and domestic intelligence agencies. As the congressional investigation detailed, the CIA was slow to inform the FBI of its interest in two of the leading hijackers, and the FBI provided only limited information to the rest of the intelligence community.

The need to do better is now clear, but much of the reason for the past disconnect between agencies is structural. The 1947 National Security Act created a DCI with responsibility for "coordinating the intelligence activities of the several Government departments and agencies in the interest of national security." But achieving coordination in practice has been difficult for a number of reasons. The intelligence agencies and the FBI have different cultures and missions. The DCI lacks control over the operations and budgets of most of the intelligence agencies. Moreover, the DCI's mandate is limited to foreign intelligence activities, both because the Cold War threat was located abroad and because of concern over preventing the use of intelligence techniques against American citizens at home. The intelligence agencies' mission is also to develop information to disrupt terrorist networks and prevent terrorist attacks.

Historically, with its focus on law enforcement, the FBI's information collecting was driven by particular cases and for the purpose of developing evidence to support prosecutions. The Bureau was also slow to share that information with intelligence analysts—all the more so because of the secrecy of grand jury proceedings. The FBI is now making a major effort to shift its mission from law enforcement after the fact to prevention beforehand, and it is beefing up its intelligence in the process.

TTIC, which reports to the DCI, has now been given responsibility to assemble and analyze foreign and domestic intelligence on the terrorist threat. It is also to play a "lead role in overseeing a national counterterrorism tasking and requirements system and for main-

[12] In the summer before the September 11 attacks, FBI agents in Minnesota sought FISA authority to search the computer of Zaccarias Moussaoui, the suspected "20th hijacker," but the authority was denied because the FBI and Justice applied a very restrictive criterion for approving such searches.

taining shared databases." It is to have "access to all intelligence information—from raw reports to finished analytic assessments—available to the U.S. government."[13]

Some of the obstacles TTIC confronts in carrying out its mandate, such as bridging the very different cultures of intelligence and law enforcement, are long-standing but made much more critical by the war on terrorism. Others, such as acquiring new sources of domestic intelligence from state and local officials and ensuring a sharing of intelligence throughout this broader community, are brand new. New ways of operating, new channels of communication, and new procedures for sharing classified information will be needed.

One concern about TTIC is that its origins in foreign intelligence and the current DCI's Counterterrorist Center will hamper it in working with domestic agencies and information. Is TTIC, staffed largely by CIA analysts and operatives and reporting to the DCI, up to the new homeland intelligence challenge of integrating information collected from many sources, producing domestic threat assessments, and disseminating their products quickly to thousands of local officials? Should the DCI's responsibility extend to coordinating the collection and analysis of domestic, as well as foreign, counterterrorism intelligence, or should that responsibility be assigned elsewhere? If with the DCI, does the DCI have enough budgetary and other authority to be successful?

If the intelligence coordinating function is located elsewhere, should it be in the Department of Homeland Security?[14] The DHS statute does call for the Secretary to "access, receive, and analyze law enforcement information, intelligence information and other information" from all levels of government and the private sector and to "integrate such information" to detect and identify threats of terrorism against the United States. Beyond this, the Secretary is to carry out assessments of the vulnerabilities to the U.S. critical infrastructure. However, DHS is restricted in what raw intelligence it will receive, and it also lacks an independent capability to collect intelligence on domestic threats (Public Law 107-296, Sec. 102). Further changes in its mandate would be needed for it to assume responsibility for coordinating intelligence analyses and collection across the foreign-domestic divide.

The creation of TTIC also raises the question of how much "competing" analysis of terrorist threats makes sense. Presently, that mandate is held not only by TTIC but also by the DHS Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection Directorate, the FBI's Counterterrorism Division and its Office of Intelligence, the DCI's Counterterrorist Center, the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence, and various offices in State, DoD, and elsewhere.

The argument for retaining several analytic capabilities, even competing ones, is that different perspectives make for the best intelligence product and ensure that policymakers know the range of uncertainties. Department and agency principals are also more comfortable having their own staff advise them on such sensitive matters. The risk is that senior officials may be confronted with multiple threat assessments and may make recommendations on the basis of different understandings. So far, CTC and DHS seem to be dividing up responsibilities for intelligence warning and comprehensive threat assessments along the foreign-domestic divide.

At this point, CIA, FBI, DHS, and DoD have moved only a few analysts to TTIC. If TTIC truly consolidated the terrorism analysis functions of all four, it would be the single

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[13] White House Fact Sheet, January 28, 2003.

[14] Bruce Berkowitz in "A Fresh Start Against Terror," *New York Times*, August 4, 2003, makes the case for such a shift.

place where foreign and domestic threat and vulnerability assessments were made and where intelligence operators could come for analytic support. Less drastically, TTIC could take over the analytic functions of CTC, leaving it with responsibility only for covert operations and traditional collection activities overseas. That, however, would remove one of CTC's key strengths, which is to inform counterterrorism operations with the analyst's picture of the dynamics of the targeted terrorists.

Still another question arises as to whether there is a need for a coordinated strategy for collecting and exploiting human intelligence across the foreign-domestic divide, and how this might be achieved. Historically, DCIs have been hard-pressed to accomplish this coordination, given their primary identification with the CIA and foreign intelligence. The staff of the Homeland Security Council has the role of identifying priorities and coordinating efforts for "collection of information within the United States regarding threats of terrorism against the United States and activities of terrorists or terrorist groups within the United States," and then, with the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, for "priorities for collection of intelligence outside the United States regarding threats of terrorism within the United States." Such a role might also be implied for TTIC because it has been given the "lead role in overseeing a national counterterrorism tasking and requirements system." So it is not clear where coordinating responsibility lies or whether either the HSC staff or TTIC has the necessary resources or authority.

How can intelligence be effectively integrated into policy actions that raise major political sensitivities, such as domestic terrorist alerts?

Intelligence coordination is particularly important in decisions to warn the public about the level of threat. Warnings are politically sensitive because they affect people's lives, create anxiety, and—if wrong—undermine confidence in government. Intelligence is the critical part of the warning process, but it is often vague and may be wrong. Thus, political leaders will be torn between their desires, on the one hand, to cover themselves lest a major attack occur and, on the other, to shape the warning to ensure public confidence. Once the government has decided to issue a warning, it is hard to know when the threat is over—because there is no standard by which to judge and often no intelligence to confirm that the threat has passed.

The problem is that the responsibility for coordinating the policy and intelligence perspectives is widely shared. In issuing past domestic terrorist alerts, the Secretary of DHS and the Attorney General have at different times been in the lead publicly, though always careful to note that their steps were being taken "in consultation with the Homeland Security Council." By statute, the DHS is to "administer the Homeland Security Advisory System, including (a) exercising primary responsibility for public advisories related to threats to homeland security; and (b) in coordination with other agencies of the Federal Government, providing specific warning information, and advice about appropriate protective measures and countermeasures to State and local government agencies and authorities, the private sector, other entities, and the public" (Public Law 107-296, Sec. 201). The question is how the coordinating process should work, and whether it should be led by the White House staff or by either the Secretary of DHS or the Attorney General.

How should the White House coordinating responsibility for counterterrorism be organized?

The final issues pertain to the White House itself, and how it organizes to coordinate the war on terrorism. The NSC had primary responsibility for most counterterrorism activities until September 11, when President Bush decided to give coordinating responsibility for homeland security—preventing and responding to terrorist attacks within the United States—to the Office of Homeland Security and the HSC. To integrate foreign and domestic activities, membership in the NSC and HSC and their supporting interagency committees is overlapping and the National Director for Combating Terrorism serves both Assistants to the President. Besides the DCI, one other staff in the White House has responsibility for coordinating aspects of counterterrorism policy: the Office of Management and Budget.

The result is a set of complex interactions and a blurring of lines of responsibility. The core problem is that although counterterrorism activities increasingly cut across the foreign-domestic divide, White House coordinating processes reinforce precisely that divide. The NSC could again take over responsibility for coordinating all counterterrorism activities by making DHS, Treasury, and Justice (DoJ) major players. The argument against such a move is that the NSC has done well when doing what it was created to do—integrating diplomacy and war-making—but has done much less well when it has tried to coordinate beyond political-military affairs—for instance, integrating economic national security issues. Indeed, it is that difficulty that led to the National Economic Council, which is the model for the HSC.

If the NSC were to assume responsibility for coordinating counterterrorism activities, should the HSC continue to exist? Its original mandate was limited to the terrorism threat. But it was expanded to cover domestic incident management when DHS was established in February 2003.[15] So the question comes back to devolution—should the DHS Secretary, with most of the resources for handling domestic incidents, be given coordinating responsibility on behalf of the President?

What should the structure of the NSC counterterrorism coordinating process be?

Having decided upon a single or divided counterterrorism White House staff, the final question is how the NSC coordinating process should be structured. Today, counterterrorism has its own Deputy National Security Advisor, staff, a senior-level interagency coordinating group, the CSG, and a number of working groups. They all tend to focus on activities directly involved in responding to potential or actual terrorist attacks.

This separate counterterrorism staff and interagency processes were created to give priority to the war on terrorism in light of the special expertise often required in counterterrorism activities. Those who participate in this coordinating process tend to be counterterrorism experts in the departments and agencies—the State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, the Defense Department's Assistant Secretary for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, and the CTC. Where counterterrorism activities are part of broader political or military policies, often with a country focus as in Afghanistan or Iraq, coordinating responsibility tends to be located with the geographic offices in the departments and agencies and in the NSC staff.

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[15] See the White House, Executive Order, February 28, 2003.

Drawing the line between these responsibilities and processes is rarely easy, and keeping them distinct may become more problematic as the war on terrorism calls increasingly for policies tailored to individual regions and countries. So one question that arises is whether it would be better to rely on the regional NSC interagency coordinating processes to handle counterterrorism in the future. Just as international economic issues now fall within the purview of the NSC regional directors, so too would coordinating responsibility for counterterrorism. If that were the choice, how would future terrorist crises be managed? Would they be handled in the CSG, as they are today, or perhaps in a single NSC interagency process with responsibility for managing *all* international crises, not just terrorism?

The Way Ahead

The table on the next page summarizes the counterterrorism coordinating challenges we have discussed in this paper and presents our recommendations.

A Vision for the White House Coordinating Process

The preferences and personalities of particular administrations will affect their decisions about coordinating mechanisms for the war on terrorism, but not all choices are equal. Given the priority counterterrorism merits and the many policies and operations it encompasses, the President needs a broad and integrated coordinating process. Such a process is best led by a White House staff, a decision driven by other reasons as well. Trying to draw a line between White House and departmental responsibilities has become nearly impossible because no department any longer has discrete responsibility for any aspect of counterterrorism operations, let alone policy. Moreover, for better or worse, history has left major departments and agencies with little trust that anyone other than the White House staff will reflect their views and interests adequately.

Now, too, the terrorist threat requires that the perspectives of all the major departments and agencies be introduced into decisions, even those involving operations, including domestic human intelligence collection, that were in the past conducted by intelligence agencies, the FBI, and the Defense Department on their own, with only intermittent involvement of a member of the White House staff. The significant growth in interactions with foreign governments both overseas and in Washington also calls for coordination and priority setting. Domestic terrorist alerts are too important and politically sensitive to be left only to DHS and the Attorney General. So, too, only the White House can ensure that the war on terrorism does not lapse into the low priority it held before September 11, and that the perspective of counterterrorism experts is routinely integrated with the broader political, economic, and other dimensions of national strategy.

Given these imperatives of a White House coordinating process, it makes no sense to divide that process in two, one for overseas policies and another for homeland security. The nature of the terrorist threat gives rise to operational imperatives that are now at cross-purposes with such an organizational structure. The establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, and with it the absorption of many domestic activities that previously called for White House coordination, creates an opportunity for such a consolidation. DHS should assume responsibility on behalf of the President for coordinating domestic incident management activities.

Coordinating Challenges and Recommendations

Challenge	Current Approach and Problem	Proposed Change
Ensuring presidential oversight	Ad hoc, complex, and intermittent approach to White House coordinating responsibilities	Create a broad and integrated coordinating process in the White House, with considerable devolution of operating responsibilities
Prioritizing requests to foreign governments	Ambassador apprised of in-country activities; whereas in Washington officials work directly with their foreign government counterparts	Assign White House Deputy National Security Advisor responsibility for coordinating interactions with foreign governments
Coordinating domestic counterterrorism intelligence collection	FISA requests originate from the FBI, with input from CIA and at times from the NSC, but not from others	Give White House staff responsibility for bringing others into FISA process and prodding FBI into sharing its information
Bridging the foreign-domestic divide in intelligence analysis and collection	Creation of TTIC, but its leadership and staffing may not be appropriate to domestic intelligence analysis	Give TTIC responsibility for analysis, including warnings and threat assessments, and provide appropriate staffing, bureaucratic clout, and access to all sensitive information
	Responsibility for analysis of terrorist threats dispersed among TTIC, DHS, FBI, CTC, CIA, State, and Defense	Retain DHS, FBI, and CTC role in analysis but focus on their narrower operational roles
	Responsibility for coordinating human intelligence collection unclear	Give TTIC responsibility for coordinating foreign and domestic human intelligence collection
Integrating intelligence into public threat warnings	Responsibility for coordinating intelligence and policy perspectives shared among DHS, DoJ, and HSC	Give White House the lead for integrating intelligence and coordinating policies on domestic alerts
Structuring White House coordination of domestic and foreign activities	Two White House counterterrorism processes (HSC and NSC) and staffs, with overlapping membership; the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) also plays a role	End bifurcated structure by placing all counterterrorism coordinating responsibility in NSC, including for economic issues and for input into the budget process
Designing NSC coordinating structure	Deputy national security advisor for counterterrorism, using CSG interagency working group; coexists with regional interagency coordinating structure	Create a single NSC coordinating process and staff for counterterrorism, led by a deputy national security advisor, with two high-level interagency committees, one for specialized counterterrorism activities and the other for counterterrorism policy toward key countries

Responsibility for all aspects of counterterrorism, both in the United States and overseas, should come under the NSC, including those that now reside with the HSC. The consolidation into the NSC of all coordinating responsibilities for the war on terrorism should be timed to occur after DHS has had at least a year to consolidate its many domestic activities—most practically when the next President takes office in 2005.

Today's National Director/Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism would be designated the President's principal assistant for conducting the war on terrorism and would have responsibility for coordinating counterterrorism policies and op-

erations including those in countries where counterterrorism is the dominant U.S. foreign policy concern. Today, this would involve Afghanistan, Philippines, and Indonesia. Iraq and the Middle East peace process would remain the responsibility of separate interagency coordination because these countries involve many vital issues not directly linked to counterterrorism. The NSC would also work closely with OMB to develop an integrated foreign and domestic counterterrorism budget.

The staff of this Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism would be made up of experts on foreign and domestic counterterrorism policies and operations, on the key countries in the war on terrorism, on economic finance, and on budgets. There would probably be a need for two senior-level interagency coordinating committees, one for such highly specialized counterterrorism activities as hostage rescues, FISA requests, terrorist finances, and the counterterrorism budget, and another for policies and operations in the key countries involved in the war on terrorism. Senior officials would be the lead representatives, but the officials would differ between the two groups. In the case of the Department of State, for example, the representative to the first group would most often be the Coordinator for Counterterrorism; to the second group, it would be the Assistant Secretary in the relevant regional bureau.

The other—and principal—Deputy National Security Advisor would ensure that the activities of these two groups fit together and would also take responsibility for ensuring that counterterrorism requests to foreign governments are coordinated and prioritized in relation to other U.S. policies. Both activities could be accomplished through an interagency committee of department deputy secretaries.

A particular challenge for the NSC staff in this approach would be encouraging and prodding those departments and agencies with lead operational responsibility into integrating their activities with others and sharing the results. This would be particularly the case for domestic agencies, such as the FBI, that are unused to the NSC process and have historically not been especially open to sharing across agencies. The NSC will also need to pay special attention to integrating intelligence information into the politically sensitive decisions on terrorist alerts and warnings. Introducing the perspectives of other agencies into the operations of DoD and the intelligence community should have the attention of the NSC staff as well.

A Vision for TTIC

As currently structured, TTIC is bureaucratically weak. It suffers from an unclear mission and is viewed as too closely linked to the CIA. TTIC should be dramatically strengthened to become the center of U.S. government analysis of terrorism, with the CTC, DHS, and the FBI limiting their analyses primarily to operational issues. The new TTIC, still under the DCI, would be responsible for assessing the full range of foreign and domestic threat information and would take over responsibility from CTC and DHS for providing terrorist warnings and comprehensive threat assessments. It would also have responsibility for coordinating foreign and domestic human intelligence collection, including FISA requests. TTIC needs to be bureaucratically independent of the CIA, DHS, and FBI.[16] It must not only en-

[16] Moving TTIC from under the DCI to DHS or to the FBI would worsen its current problems. TTIC might lose its focus on foreign terrorist movements, which is a key part of its mission. Moreover, instead of being viewed as biased toward the

joy its own budget but also have bureaucratic clout. The head of TTIC must be able to talk directly with the DCI, the FBI director, the secretary of Homeland Security and—more rarely—the National Security Advisor.

A key to TTIC's future success is developing its own cadre of analysts and creating a career service separate from the CIA. It could then develop an institutional culture and practice, be less directly beholden to CTC for support and expertise, and serve as an honest broker of both domestic and foreign intelligence. As part of its mandate to develop a separate analytical capability, TTIC should also have the ability to hire and train analysts for the domestic side, adding further credibility and value to TTIC's role.

As a first step toward accomplishing this goal, TTIC would need to bring a majority of CTC analysts directly into its ranks to form its core cadre and give it a solid counterterrorism analytic capability because analytic expertise is not currently available in large numbers outside CTC. In addition, these experts must train FBI analysts and new hires not accustomed to undertaking strategic assessments of terrorist groups. As a result, TTIC needs many of CTC's best analysts, despite the bureaucratic resistance such a move would inevitably entail.

The challenge for CTC analysts—who have focused largely on assessing threats to U.S. interests overseas—will be to separate from CIA culture, incorporate domestic intelligence into their assessments, and fuse the information to make better judgments about counterterrorism threats at home and abroad and their interconnections and implications for U.S. interests. TTIC will also want to hire additional analysts from the outside, as people become available, to broaden its analytic reach. It will take longer to bring these analysts up to speed on how to assess terrorist threats, but they will not be beholden to any agency other than TTIC.

TTIC also needs to have access to law enforcement–sensitive and raw operational information that is traditionally heavily compartmented and is not given to all analysts. Because operational components in CTC and special agents working on specific investigations guard this information, they will be reluctant to share it with all—or any—analysts in TTIC. But TTIC cannot carry out its responsibilities without such information. Analysts cannot allow non-analysts to decide what data they need.

Once TTIC's new role becomes institutionalized, the division of labor among it and CTC, FBI, and DHS should be clarified. Both CTC and the FBI would retain analysts, but their role should be ensuring that operations, including intelligence collection, are informed by analysis. That has been the case with CTC, and, for similar reasons, the FBI will also want to have an analytic capability closely linked to its own operations. The FBI is working hard to bring its counterterrorism analysts up to the same level of quality and skill as currently exists in CTC, a process that should continue, and CTC has contributed time and energy to training FBI analysts in counterterrorism tradecraft.

DHS would depend on TTIC for coordinated intelligence in carrying out its domestic preparedness measures, e.g., airport security, protection of critical infrastructure. It should continue to develop its own analytic cadre working to support its role in the domestic warning systems and assessing the vulnerability of U.S. infrastructure. More specifically, it will need to integrate TTIC's analysis into useful information for state and local officials. In this

CIA, it would simply develop a reputation of a different bias. In addition, both the FBI and DHS are undergoing massive bureaucratic changes—adding yet another bureaucracy to these institutions would further complicate matters at this time.

way, DHS will have a role similar to CTC and the FBI—a small analytic cadre working in direct support of the operators in the field.

Conclusion

In the end, if the war on terrorism is the nation's number one national security priority, governmental structure and presidential attention will have to reflect that fact. The war needs to be managed by the White House, although with considerable devolution of operating responsibilities to lead agencies, e.g., military operations to DoD and managing domestic incidents to DHS. Drawing an appropriate line will be difficult and will require analysis beyond the scope of this paper.

The NSC can become an effective vehicle for managing the war on terrorism both at home and abroad, if the President makes clear that this is his choice. The nation's intelligence has no higher task than to connect the dots of information about threats from at home and abroad, and for that task the government needs a sharply reinforced and much more independent TTIC.