A new series of updates to Congress on RAND’s work in terrorism and homeland security

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HOT TOPICS

Domestic Intelligence Reform?

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, critics have charged that the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), while qualified to investigate terrorist incidents after they have occurred, is inadequately equipped to prevent attacks, given the FBI’s strong and prevailing emphasis on law enforcement and prosecution. Deliberation has subsequently focused on the prudence of creating a new U.S. domestic intelligence agency outside the structure of the FBI that is solely dedicated to counterterrorism information collection, analysis, assessment, and dissemination.

To better inform debate, the RAND Corporation analyzed the structures and experiences of domestic intelligence agencies in four allied democracies—the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Australia—in a new report. In each case, the authors consider the organization’s overall structure, its mandate and main responsibilities, its relationship with the police, and the oversight and accountability each has with its respective government. While significant historical, cultural, and political differences exist among the United States and the four countries studied, the cases provide valuable insights that could act as a benchmark for guiding possible development of a domestic intelligence agency within the United States.

READ MORE: Confronting the “Enemy Within”: Security Intelligence, the Police, and Counterterrorism in Four Democracies

Geospatial Information: A Homeland Security Risk?

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the question of whether publicly available geospatial information could be useful for attacking U.S. critical infrastructure and other key homeland locations has become a significant public policy issue. Federal agencies took precautions by reexamining their information protection policies and, in some cases, removed geospatial information from their publicly accessible Web sites or federal depository libraries.

This RAND report sought to better understand how publicly available geospatial information can be exploited by possible attackers and what kinds of information might prove most valuable. RAND researchers developed an analytical framework that applies three key criteria—usefulness, uniqueness, and societal benefits and cost—to assessing the homeland security implications of geospatial information that is publicly available.

The report recommends that the federal government use this analytical framework as a first step in deciding what geospatial information should be restricted, develop a more comprehensive model for the longer term, and increase awareness among the public and private sectors concerning how their geospatial information could be used for deleterious motives.

READ MORE: Mapping the Risks: Assessing the Homeland Security Implications of Publicly Available Geospatial Information

Coordinating the War on Terrorism

The federal government has been beset with a confounding array of new and distinct challenges in coordinating the war on terrorism. This war requires not only the synchronization of the panoply of military, intelligence, law enforcement, and diplomatic instruments within its arsenal but also the harmonization of national policy formation and implementation and the reaching out to state and local governments at home and to governments abroad. With the growing number of departments and agencies involved in counterterrorism efforts, it is crucial for coordination to be centralized and institutionalized for the successful prosecution of the war on terror.

This RAND Occasional Paper addresses the critical coordination issues in the war on terrorism both in the White House and in the intelligence community, in order to mitigate the risks of mistakes, lost opportunities, conflicting and redundant policies, and actions that diverge from the President’s goals. It surveys the historical record, lays out choices, and recommends that the National Security Council and staff coordinate foreign and domestic counterterrorism efforts. It also calls for upgrading the Terrorist Threat Integration Center to become the focal point for providing foreign and domestic terrorist analysis and warnings.

READ MORE: Coordinating the War on Terrorism

Terrorist Motivations and Capabilities

As the war on terrorism continues, U.S. policymakers are faced with the difficult challenge of assessing the threats that various terrorist groups pose to the U.S. homeland and U.S. interests abroad. In addition, counterterrorism efforts likely will be in competition with other international policy concerns and strategic pursuits. Therefore, it is essential that the U.S. government prioritize its counterterrorism activities and conduct the war on terrorism as efficiently as possible.

This RAND report develops a matrix that helps policymakers identify the threats that different terrorist groups pose to the United States and assesses how these groups adapt and change, in order to identify their vulnerabilities. While the dynamic nature of terrorism creates a difficulty in predicting new and emerging threats, this framework allows policymakers to place parameters around threats and creates a foundation of analysis on which future counterterrorism strategy may be built.

READ MORE: The Dynamic Terrorist Threat: An Assessment of Group Motivations and Capabilities in a Changing World

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