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DHS Headquarters Integrated Operations Staff Capability

**CONCEPT PAPER
FOR DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP TEAM REVIEW**



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Pre-decisional working paper

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Purpose:

This paper discusses the need for an overarching operations staff capability within the DHS headquarters to bridge the existing gap between integrated threat monitoring and assessment (an HSOC/Assistant Secretary for Information Analysis responsibility) and corresponding integrated operational response activities (fragmented across DHS components and staff offices), on a “steady-state” basis and during contingencies. This gap also includes a lack of an appropriate mechanism to coordinate operational response activities with the interagency, as well as with the HSC/NSC (CSG).

Issue:

DHS headquarters does not have an established mechanism for linking the threat monitoring and assessment functions (in an all-hazards context) with a corresponding integrated operational response function across DHS components and activities. Although DHS headquarters does have an established and validated mechanism for enabling executive decisionmaking during “post-incident” contingency situations (Homeland Security Operations Center/Interagency Incident Management Group/Initial National Response Plan), this mechanism is currently not functional in the “steady-state” or “heightened alert” mode outside the context of an actual incident. This deficiency denies the DHS leadership the ability to consider and direct operational actions in day-to-day or “pre-incident” scenarios based upon a coordinated and integrated set of course of action recommendations developed by an appropriate integrating staff function. This deficiency also complicates DHS operational coordination with other agencies and with the HSC/NSC (CSG) during steady-state and pre-incident periods. These problems will become more acute with the implementation of the DHS regional structure if not remedied.

Proposed Operations Staff Capability

Develop a DHS headquarters staff function to: facilitate seamless horizontal integration and coordination of headquarters-level operational activities by integrating cross-directorate operations and contingency planning; providing synchronized staff support to the Department Leadership Team for day-to-day operational response, heightened alert, and crisis decision making activities; managing the operational planning and execution of headquarters-level readiness exercises; and coordinating and integrating operational planning, contingency support, and exercise requirements with DHS Regional Directors and their staffs.

Proposed Operations Staff Roles and Functions

- Develop a headquarters-level operational planning system and coordinate the development of cross-directorate and regional operations and contingency plans;
- Develop a system to facilitate integrated, cross-component operational and contingency plan execution at the national and regional levels;
- Develop a national base line “campaign” plan detailing operational activities associated with changes in the Homeland Security Advisory System;

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- Develop and administer a system to ensure the seamless integration and coordination of threat monitoring and corresponding cross-directorate operational response activities on a day-to-day basis (beyond the scope of IA and IP coordination with external stakeholders);
- Provide integrated, cross-directorate operational staff support, to include operational response course of action development, to the DHS leadership on a day-to-day basis;
- Provide day-to-day integrated DHS operational interface with the Counterterrorism Security Group and other EOP organizations;
- Enable senior executive decisionmaking and provide “battlestaff” support during periods of heightened alert and contingency situations;
- Provide overall administrative oversight of headquarters-level operational functions and programs assigned to DHS in the National Response Plan;
- Provide sustained management oversight for the Interagency Incident Management Group, Homeland Security Operations Center, and the nationwide Principal Federal Official (PFO) network;
- Coordinate and integrate cross-directorate headquarters and regional-level operational participation in the National Homeland Security Exercise Program (NHSEP) and other designated training activities;
- Develop and administer an after action reporting, “lessons learned,” and best-practices system based on NHSEP and other training event outcomes; and
- Develop a system to assess DHS regional-level preparedness for contingency operations.

Proposed Concept of Operations

- DHS functional components maintain operational control over all component resources/assets; Operations staff personnel perform a coordinating/integrating role and have no directive or command authority over DHS component resources/assets
- Operations staff personnel take the lead role in integrating and coordinating cross-directorate “steady-state” operational preparedness activities (HSAS operational “campaign plan” development, contingency plan development, “care and feeding” of the nationwide PFO network, administrative maintenance of the IIMG and INRP support functions, readiness exercises, etc.)
- Operations staff personnel attend daily threat SVTC sessions and HSOC briefings to gain and maintain “steady-state” situational awareness
- Operations staff personnel compile and consolidate cross-directorate input and lead DHS representation at the weekly Risk Management Group (RMG) SVTC session
- During normal periods, HSOC continues to monitor the overall threat picture and consolidate and report day-to-day situational awareness and component operational activities to the DHS leadership through the Secretary’s Morning Summary and operational SITREPs as required
 - HSOC handles routine operational activities not keyed to specific threats; oversees daily common operating picture and alerts DHS leadership of any anomalies

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- During periods of heightened alert based on a general threat picture, operations staff personnel will compile and provide an enhanced set of cross-directorate operational course of action recommendations to help inform the initial HSAS change decision, as well as continuously update and provide additional course of action recommendations to the DHS leadership as the threat-operational picture evolves
 - Operations staff personnel will convene and lead tailored DHS/IIMG meetings/planning sessions as required to coordinate the operational activities of appropriate DHS entities and other Federal departments and agencies within a common framework
 - Operations staff personnel will take the lead in daily coordination with the Counterterrorism Security Group (CSG) and help prepare the DHS leadership for Homeland Security DC/PC meetings associated with the evolving threat-operational picture
- During periods of heightened alert based upon specific, credible threats, operations staff personnel will convene and lead continuous internal DHS planning sessions and tailored IIMG meetings and provide continuously updated operational situational awareness briefings and operational course of action recommendations to the DHS leadership
 - Operations staff personnel will take the lead in daily coordination with the CSG and help prepare the DHS leadership for Homeland Security DC/PC meetings associated with the evolving threat/operational picture
- During a “post-incident” response, operations staff personnel will convene and lead a continuous session of the IIMG tailored to meet the demands of the scenario at hand as detailed in the Initial National Response Plan and IIMG Standard Operating Procedures document
 - Operations staff personnel will work in conjunction with HSOC, IA, DHS component staffs, and staff offices; representatives from other federal departments and agencies; and the deployed PFO network to provide continuous situational awareness, overall incident management oversight, and enable DHS executive crisis decisionmaking
 - Operations staff personnel will take the lead in continuous coordination with the CSG and help prepare the DHS leadership for Homeland Security DC/PC meetings associated with the evolving threat/operational picture

Recommendation:

- Recommend that a day-to-day operational support staff function be instituted within the recently activated Headquarters Operational Integration Staff (I-Staff)
 - The I-Staff charter approved by the Secretary currently reflects all the tasks and functions described above (to include cross-directorate planning, exercises, and incident management), with the exception of those related to the tying together of threat monitoring, analysis, and operational response activities on a day-to-day and pre-incident basis
 - This recommendation leverages the existing incident management systems, processes, and protocols that have been developed and validated during the past

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year in line with the INRP; minimizes change from a known and rehearsed set of protocols

- The I-Staff works directly for the DHS leadership Team and is at the appropriate level to interface with the CSG, HSC, and other EOP organizations on operational matters
- This recommendation ties together the headquarters-level operational planning and execution process horizontally across the directorates, as well as vertically down to the DHS regions

The Purpose and the Issue as defined in the working paper are based upon conflicting statements. The Purpose paragraph states that there is a “lack of an appropriate mechanism to coordinate operational response activities within the interagency,” while the Issue paragraph states, “this mechanism is currently not functional in the “steady-state” or “heightened alert.” There is a system for interagency coordination and it is called the Emergency Support Function (ESF) under the National Response Plan.

If this system, which is currently directed by FEMA through its role and responsibilities, does not meet the requirements of the Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC) it would be more efficient to enhance FEMA’s responsibilities and concentrate on the integration of that role into the HSOC needs as opposed to recreating the wheel as this proposal proposes.

The first thought that comes to mind is empire building or a lack of understanding of the role and responsibilities of the EP&R directorate of DHS. The very use of the descriptor that there exists a “deficiency” that complicates the operational coordination of other agencies indicates a notional thought that something exists to serve this function. Therefore, an understanding of the role that FEMA plays in coordinating through the former Federal Response Plan and now through the Interim National Response Plan and through the National Response Plan in the future is critical in addressing this issue.

Virtually each example cited is a current capability that FEMA maintains. The very fact that one doesn’t know about it or doesn’t understand it does not necessitate the requirement to go forth and create it. Under Proposed Operations Staff Roles and Functions, Bullets 1, 2 and 3 are already being conducted through FEMA’s program directorates and regional planning functions. Bullets 11 and 12 again are being performed through the RAMP. How many of these programs does DHS need?

FEMA is already in the business of coordinating operations within the scope of most DHS activities. You have to look no further than the response to the shuttle disaster to see that the system does in fact work. If the desire is to make that capability more robust to address the issues and ideas discussed in the working paper, then the appropriate action would be to strengthen those responsibilities and not attempt to insert a staff level organizational element within the Secretary’s office into the chain of command between the Secretary and those organizational elements responsible for operations within the department. It would be a most positive and welcome occurrence to have DHS recognize the capabilities and role that FEMA plays and build upon these capabilities.

We all strive to serve the Secretary to the best of our abilities; however the effectiveness and efficacy of that service need not be judged on the proximity to the Homeland Security Operations Center. The Proposed Concept of Operations completely ignores the day-to-day activity in which FEMA is involved. The whole tenor of the working paper ignores the very core of the response to events in this country and that is FEMA’s response to the garden-variety disaster. The paper does not begin to delve into the response and coordination efforts necessary to respond to that localized flood, or ice storm that consumes much of the monies of the disaster support account. You cannot

have a system that is not interested in picking up the debris from an ice storm in South Carolina in January and turn around and want to have an operational role in an approaching hurricane in May. This type of approach does little more than confuse state and local officials. The current working paper serves as an outline of the problem that is created by structuring an operational concept for response to terrorism while ignoring the natural disaster component.