

## **Policy Reforms and Homeland Security: The Question of Organisation**

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The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States resulted in endless policy reforms in the name of 'homeland security' in many countries worldwide. One of the more significant reforms in the United States was the introduction of the Department of Homeland Security. In arguably the most substantial bureaucratic reform of its history, the formation of this department involved the amalgamation of over twenty independent agencies involved in securing the homeland into one single, hierarchical organisation. The Department was largely formed because of an age-old problem: inter-agency coordination. There are many reasons why security, law enforcement and intelligence agencies always have been reluctant to share information. These include legislative and operational security requirements that place a premium on 'information protection' over 'information sharing' and, as was reported in the United States, agency cultures that were based on high levels of distrust. These concerns are not new and are by no means limited to the field of homeland security. But, it seems that whenever an incident takes place, such as the attempted airline bombing in Detroit late last year, questions are asked concerning inter-agency coordination and communication.

While there have been many policy reforms in the area of homeland security, the question of how to improve inter-agency coordination comes up time and time again in many countries. Policy debates usually alternate between those presenting 'hierarchical' forms of organisation and those presenting 'network' forms of organisation as the best means of managing this task. Hierarchies include the traditional Weberian style bureaucracy with clearly defined horizontal (as in divisions between units) and vertical (as in layers of authority) differentiation. As with the Department of Homeland Security, the basic idea is that levels of management and an individual leader at the top is the best way to achieve coordination. Networks aim to develop loose 'ties' between independent agencies. There are no clear lines of control, but rather inter-agency coordination within this network is based more on less formal mechanisms such as trust.

Introducing a Department of Homeland Security in Australia was a policy of the Australian Labor Party adopted shortly after the organisation was established in the United States on 24 January 2003. While it was not clear which agencies were to be included in this new department, most reports suggested it would have brought together over ten agencies to then become separate units within a large, single organisation. These included the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, the Australian Federal Police,

and the Australian Customs Service as well as many sections of government departments such as the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Attorney-General's Department. The logic behind the proposal was that hierarchical forms of organisation were the most effective means of ensuring inter-agency coordination. It was likened by some to the creation of the Department of Defence under Gough Whitlam in the 1970s in which separate departments—including air, army and navy—were amalgamated in the one, large organisation.

The Department of Homeland Security remained a policy of the Australian Labor Party right up to it being elected to form government on 24 November 2007. Within days of the election, however, reports emerged that the proposed department would be abandoned. It was reported that senior bureaucrats had informed the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd that creating such a department would be very 'risky' and do little to improve inter-agency coordination. In the National Security Statement delivered to the Australian Parliament on 4 December 2008, Rudd ruled out establishing a Department of Homeland Security. This decision was based on a confidential review of Australia's homeland and border security arrangements conducted by Mr Ric Smith, the former secretary of the Department of Defence. Rudd confirmed that the 'whole-of-government' framework in Australia would continue to follow the model adopted under John Howard, comprised of 'networked' or 'joined-up' forms of organisation.

It is not surprising that the policy to introduce the Department of Homeland Security was abandoned by the Labor Government. In fact, some would suggest that the question is why such a policy was held in the first place given few analysts thought it was a good idea and most argued—and continue to argue—that the United States' version is well short of a success. And history certainly is full of examples where policies in opposition can quickly change in government. Nonetheless, the more important point is that the policy reflects the long-held view by many that hierarchies are the only 'real' form of organisation. Networks are increasing in number and importance as an approach to inter-agency coordination in many areas of public administration. The question of how to manage inter-agency coordination will continue to be asked, particularly in the context of homeland security, but it is helpful to look back to consider how the meaning and process of organising is changing to avoid recycling old ideas and be better prepared for the task of (re-)organising. It is clear that, regardless of the result of the present election, we will most likely see more policy reforms concerning inter-agency coordination in the field of homeland security.

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