

DISORGANIZATION: UNDERSTANDING THE
ORGANIZATIONAL PATHOLOGIES OF THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Political Science
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

April 2024

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Caroline Simone for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Political Science to be taken June 2024

Title: Disorganization: Understanding the Organizational Pathologies of the
United States Department of Homeland Security

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Since its inception in 2003, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has faced scrutiny for its inefficient bureaucracy, its undesirable workplace environment, and its problematic budgeting allocations. Formed at a time of crisis, the department's swift formation and opening immediately made it susceptible to mismanagement and deleterious budget expenses. Within the past century, a theory called "organization theory" has become increasingly popular to describe how organizations, companies, and groups of people choose to assemble, order, and operate themselves.

Organization theory considers aspects such as organizational culture, group dynamics, leadership characteristics, and communication as key indicators of organization success and/or failure. Political scientists have continually applied organization theory to several facets of politics, including government agencies/departments and militaries. This study investigates whether or not the U.S. Department of Homeland Security demonstrates many of the same organizational pathologies that impact the abilities of professional military organizations and other bureaucratic entities from performing their duties in an efficient and effective manner. This study also examines how those pathologies are manifested through the department's activities, such as a lack of communication resulting in duplicative spending for national security resources,

ineffective and unfounded Transportation passenger screening policies, and a hesitancy to shift investigative focus from foreign threats to domestic threats.

This study concludes with recommendations regarding the future of the Department of Homeland Security and its operations, along with an analysis of what agencies and departments may be more impactful and successful placements for the various subunits of the DHS. While this study does not examine the dissolution of the subunits within the DHS themselves, it does examine the potential impacts of the scenario in which the DHS is dissolved, and its subunits are reassigned to other components of the federal government.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my primary thesis advisor, Dr. Jane Cramer. Dr. Cramer has been one of the most positive and supportive presences in my life here at the University of Oregon and has always encouraged me to strive for more in my academic and professional life. Through her, I was able to discover more about my passion for policy research and analysis and put that passion into practical use. I would also like to thank Dr. Rebecca Altman, my CHC advisor - Dr. Altman's ability to derive the best out of every student she interacts with has had a profound impact on me, especially throughout this process. I am so grateful to have been able to work with both over the span of several years.

I am incredibly grateful for the work that the 260,000 DHS employees conduct every day in order to secure the United States. While this work is a critique and analysis of the department itself, employees of the DHS continuously strive towards enhancing the safety and prosperity of Americans. A special thank you to the DHS employees who eagerly joined the DHS immediately after its creation, in the wake of national and international uncertainty following the 9/11 attacks.

I would also like to thank my friends here in Eugene and in Northern Virginia. I am so thankful for my closest friends from home, Aidan Herzig and Chloe Valcourt. They have stuck with me not only throughout the thesis process, but throughout the awkward middle school and high school phases, homecoming dances, road trips, and my horrible texting skills. There is no one else I would have rather had by my side while I engaged in the experiences that laid the foundation of who I am today. I owe so much of my work to my friends here in Eugene, as well. To feel your love and support is an honor I never want to take for granted, and I cannot thank you all enough for being patient with me as I grew as a person, a student, and a professional.

I want to thank my wonderful partner, Lainie Bell. Thank you for listening to my random DHS facts, helping me realize my capabilities as a writer and a researcher, and never failing to make me feel like the luckiest person in the world. Thank you to Blanca and Jessica Romero for making my younger years filled with love and for having an endless amount of confidence in what I can achieve. Thank you to my grandparents, Suzanne and Larry Spillman, for thinking of my future so early on in their lives and for being a source of strength and inspiration for me in every stage of my life. Lastly, I want to thank my parents, Mark and Hannah Simone. They both have made massive sacrifices for me to attend the University of Oregon and have always prioritized my success and wellbeing. My work, in every setting of my life, will always be dedicated to them.

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Introduction / DHS Background

Introduction

“I can hear you! I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you! And the people -- and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon,”¹ U.S. President George W. Bush exclaimed during his iconic “Bullhorn Speech.” Standing at Ground Zero in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and surrounded by first responders, President Bush vowed to the nation and to the world that the U.S. would respond forcefully to avenge the nearly 3,000 lives lost. 23 years later, it is abundantly clear that the U.S. did indeed respond with force. Between the September 11th attacks and 2022, the U.S. has conducted over 14,000 drone strikes against targets with suspected terrorist affiliations.² Until March 2023, almost 300,000 terrorists have been killed, and upwards of 182,000 members of national military and police forces from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Syria have been killed.³ Dozens of NATO-led military operations were launched in the years following the attacks, including Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, and Operation Inherent Resolve against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).⁴ However, drone strikes, and international military operations were not the only ways in which the U.S. exerted force against terrorists and their affiliates. To mitigate terrorist attacks - and even prevent them entirely - the U.S. constructed and implemented the public security apparatus known as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

¹ Eindenmuller, Michael, “The Rhetoric of 9/11: Bullhorn Address at Ground Zero (9-14-01).”

² Fuhrmann, Matthew and Schwartz, Joshua. “Do Armed Drones Reduce Terrorism? Here’s the Data.”

³ U.S. Department of Defense, “Casualty Status.”

⁴ Congressional Research Service, “U.S. Periods of War and Dates of Recent Conflicts.”

Composed of 22 distinct agencies, more than 260,000 employees, and an FY 2024 budget of \$103.2 billion with \$60.4 billion in discretionary spending⁵, the DHS has become a bureaucratic behemoth. It is the third-largest department in terms of staff and the sixth-largest department in terms of budget⁶ - however, as security/defense technology becomes more advanced and the need to replace an aging security infrastructure grows by the day, the budget is expected to increase.

DHS History - 1800s

The notion of “homeland security” in the U.S. dates to the country’s founding - albeit with a series of different names. Due to the young country’s exposure to both Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, the country’s early bureaucrats and defense officials agreed that there was sufficient need for a coastal defense, giving rise to coastal artillery dotted along the mid-Atlantic and eventually the modern Coast Guard. In correspondence with its foreign policy embracing a more isolationist approach, homeland security in the U.S. gradually began to focus on domestic issues, specifically on westward expansion, the arrival of various immigration groups, and the creation of political-social groups that were seen as “dissent” groups.

Homeland security in the United States narrowed its focus on the country’s increased immigrant population at the end of the 1700s and into the 1800s with the passing of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798.⁷ The set of laws gave the executive branch the power to deport non-citizens, implemented greater restrictions on the naturalization process, and created criminal penalties for the act of disseminating false information about the federal government. Numerous immigrant groups drew the ire of the federal government and the public, including Irish and

⁵ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “FY 2024 Budget-in-Brief.”

⁶ USA Spending.gov, “Agency Profiles.”

⁷ National Archives, “Alien and Sedition Acts.”

German immigrants (due to rampant anti-Catholicism) and Chinese immigrants, many of whom had come to the U.S. in the mid-1800s to contribute to the construction of the country's burgeoning railroads. Anti-immigration politics in the 1800s quickly became explicitly racist, with the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882⁸ and escalations in public antagonism towards non-Protestant/Caucasian immigrants. Several groups formed to "combat" the perceived threat of immigration and other domestic affairs concerns, including the Know Nothing Party. The Ku Klux Klan, created in the aftermath of the Civil War, also focused its hatred on various immigrant groups.

During this time period came the creation of a key entity that would one day become part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security - the U.S. Secret Service. President Abraham Lincoln created the U.S. Secret Service only several hours before his assassination on April 14th, 1865, intending for the Secret Service to become a primary investigator of counterfeit operations throughout the country.⁹ As counterfeit and other financial crimes were rampant at the time, a dedicated federal service was needed to focus on these criminal activities. The Secret Service would also take charge of protecting the President, Vice President, and several key members of the executive branch. Given its historical role in investigating financial crimes, the Secret Service was originally placed under the purview of the Department of Treasury until the formation of the DHS in 2003.

In 1891, the federal government officially took control of processes related to immigration into the United States, including "inspecting, admitting, rejecting, and processing"

⁸ National Archives, "Chinese Exclusion Act."

⁹ United States Secret Service, "Timeline of Our History."

all immigrants with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1891.¹⁰ The Act also created the Office of the Superintendent of Immigration, situated in the Department of Treasury, along with various processing stations around the country - most notably, one located on Ellis Island, New York. The Immigration Act of 1891 gave way to greater formalization of immigration for the U.S. federal government, setting the stage for it to become a key homeland security issue in the 20th and 21st centuries.

DHS History - 1900s

The outbreak of World War I led to greater domestic challenges in the United States. After the U.S. entered the war effort in 1917, Congress quickly became concerned that foreign operatives sought to infiltrate the country's intelligence community and procure sensitive defense information. This fear was heightened by the discovery of the Zimmerman Telegram in January 1917¹¹, when the German Empire's Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Arthur Zimmerman, sent a telegram to the German ambassador in Mexico that proposed a joint German Mexican invasion of the U.S. in the event that the U.S. became involved in World War I. Congress rapidly passed two pieces of legislation aimed at discouraging espionage and political dissent. The Espionage Act of 1917 punished individuals who sought to leak classified national security information, while the Sedition Act of 1918 broadly punished individuals who spoke against the American war effort in almost any form. The federal government targeted several groups during its mission to suppress espionage and war opposition, including the budding socialist movement, anarchists, and labor activists. These acts were also a precursor to the larger Red Scare in the

¹⁰ Smith and Kurian, *A Historical Guide to the U.S. Government*.

¹¹ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "The Zimmerman Telegram."

U.S. following the conclusion of the war, which led to hundreds of deportations, invasive searches and seizures, and a suppression of Free Speech.

In the 1920s and 1930s, homeland security measures in the U.S. tightened to accommodate the influx of immigrants into the country, along with an escalation in socialist and anarchist thought. In 1924, the federal government created the U.S. Border Patrol to combat smuggling across the country's borders and enhanced its ability to enact deportations.¹² In 1933, the Bureau of Immigration and the Bureau of Naturalization were consolidated to form the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), which would exist for 70 years until it was replaced by various DHS subunits. The Immigration and Naturalization Service worked together with the Border Patrol and the FBI to investigate and prevent illegal entries into the United States and took charge of processing immigration applications.

During this time, the federal government began to take a more active role in disaster management. While the government had provided some disaster assistance in the 19th century, in instances such as during the Great Chicago Fire in 1871, it was largely absent from the field of disaster relief until federal income tax began to be collected in 1913.¹³ These taxes gave the government a larger budget for disaster relief and assistance while also easing the burden of private charitable societies, who at the time bore the brunt of relief for citizens. The Great Chicago Fire and 1906 San Francisco earthquake drew attention to the need of a centralized and coordinated government response to disasters, as charitable societies were quickly overwhelmed, and their resources were rapidly drained in the immediate aftermath of the disasters. During the first half of the 20th century, the federal government worked closely with banks, the U.S. Army

¹² United States Customs and Border Protection, "Border Patrol History."

¹³ Al-Ubaydli, "Disaster Relief: Lessons from the Chicago Fire of 1871."

Corps of Engineers, and housing agencies to address disasters impacting Americans. However, the federal government's disaster assistance mechanisms were not formally centralized until President Jimmy Carter's Executive Order 12127 in 1979, which created the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).¹⁴ For the first decade of its existence, FEMA was primarily a civil defense agency, charged with coordinating the mobilization of civilians and their resources in the event of an enemy attack. However, after the cessation of the Cold War, FEMA's operations shifted to primarily concern disaster management, recovery, and prevention. It operated largely as an independent agency until the creation of the DHS,

When Imperial Japan bombed Naval Station Pearl Harbor, the federal government's focus again shifted towards homeland security matters. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, the government drafted plans to intern thousands of Japanese Americans in internment camps across the West Coast, citing the attack as evidence that Japanese Americans potentially posed a risk to the country's national security through their alleged contacts with Japan. The internment of German Americans and Italian Americans also occurred during the United States' involvement in World War II, but on a much smaller scale. The Alien Registration Program was introduced during World War II, which required the INS to obtain the fingerprints of every noncitizen residing in the United States.

Post-World War II America brought a short but relatively stable period of stability as the country enjoyed the fruits of being a global superpower who recently secured a definitive victory against several ideological opponents. While the optimism of the late 1940s and 1950s fueled relative contentment at home, there were escalating fears about the intentions and actions of the

¹⁴ Federal Emergency Management Agency, "The Federal Emergency Management Agency Publication 1."

continually militarizing Soviet Union. The National Security Act of 1947¹⁵ initiated changes to U.S. foreign policy to respond to the increasingly tense Cold War, establishing the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Council (NSC), which advises the president on national security matters. Several executive orders were announced during rising anxieties related to growing Soviet influence, such as the Federal Employee Loyalty Program, which consisted of review boards designed to assess the loyalty of federal employees to the United States government. The most publicized effort conducted during what is now known generally as the United States' second "Red Scare" came in the form of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), which investigated figures ranging from government officials to Hollywood stars and accused them of being Soviet spies. Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin played a key role in the Senate's own efforts to root out the alleged specter of communism in the American government and public life.

As the tensions of the Cold War began to de-escalate with the declining health of the USSR's General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and the signing of the SALT I and SALT II Treaties, a new phenomenon began to emerge as a focus of renewed homeland security efforts. On November 4th, 1979, a group of students aligning themselves with the group *The Muslim Students of the Imam's Line* broke through the walled U.S. embassy in Tehran, Iran and took U.S. embassy staff hostage for 444 days.¹⁶ While the hostages were eventually released during President Ronald Reagan's inauguration on January 20th, 1981, U.S. national security policy shifted towards an alarmingly violent Islamic revolutionary movement.

¹⁵ Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, "National Security Act of 1947."

¹⁶ Gregory L. Schneider, "Jimmy Carter and the Iran Hostage Crisis."

The late 20th century ushered in a new era of homeland security - not only for the United States, but for almost every country in the world.¹⁷ In 1988, a Libyan terrorist brought down Pan Am flight 103, which was flying from London's Heathrow International Airport to New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport. The attack killed 270 people, including every passenger on the flight. In 1995, Chechen separatists took over 1,000 individuals hostage in its Budyonovka hospital attack. Hamas escalated its attacks in the Middle East throughout the latter half of the 20th century, as the implications of Israel's 1948 creation in the aftermath of World War II began to materialize. Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo's sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system in 1995 gave officials newfound anxiety over bioterrorism and chemical attacks on large public areas. The bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing proved to officials that the threat of large-scale terrorist attack on U.S. soil needed to be properly addressed. There were several changes in U.S. homeland security policy that reflected these growing tensions. The Immigration and Naturalization Service expanded its workforce from approximately 8,000 employees in the late 1970s to 30,000 employees by 2000. The INS also began to create specialized units for its operations, with certain teams dealing with asylum applications, other teams focusing on the controlled entry of tourists into the United States, and many other teams focusing on a variety of missions. The U.S. Coast Guard began to take a more active role in national security matters, deploying to the Adriatic Sea to assist NATO efforts against the Republic of Yugoslavia.¹⁸ The U.S. Border Patrol intensified its manpower and technological advancements through its

¹⁷ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Counter Terrorism Guide: Historic Timeline."

¹⁸ United States Coast Guard, "Time Line 1900s - 2000s."

launching of Operation Hold the Line and Operation Gatekeeper, which decreased illegal immigration into San Diego, California by 75%. However, security gaps remained. Airport security remained the responsibility of individual airlines, not the federal government itself. Communication between intelligence agencies stagnated, and threats from abroad were discounted as being overblown or extremely unlikely to materialize - a failure that the 9/11 Commission deemed as a lack of “imagination.”¹⁹ According to the Commission’s report, it was difficult for homeland security experts to comprehend a terrorist attack killing hundreds of people. The notion of thousands of casualties occurring through a singularly coordinated attack was far from reality for the nation’s officials. Unfortunately, the kind of catastrophic attack that national security officials once deemed unimaginable transpired on September 11th, 2001.

DHS History - 2000 and Beyond

Homeland security entered the public consciousness in the way we know it today at 9:03 AM EST, when a second plane - Flight 175 - hit the World Trade Center’s South Tower.²⁰ What was first perceived as a horrific accident was now deemed an intentional and coordinated attack on the United States. Immediately, White House senior staff and national security officials began to scramble to secure the country. The FAA received the order to shut down the entirety of U.S. airspace a little less than an hour after the attacks first began. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld ordered the entire U.S. military to upgrade its defense readiness condition. Bush was taken to the U.S. Strategic Command bunker that was designed to withstand nuclear attacks before flying back to Washington. As the country locked itself in, policymakers and the public

¹⁹ The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, “9/11 Commission Report.”

²⁰ Katherine Huiskies, “Timeline: The September 11 Attacks.”

alike began to ask themselves two critical questions: how did such a large-scale attack occur without its plans being detected, and how is the country going to protect itself now?

While an immediate sense of unity and support amongst American servicemembers gave way to military action and intervention shortly after the 9/11 attacks, the DHS was created in an atmosphere of division, specifically through the clashing of political rivalries. National security expert Richard A. Clarke explained in his novel *Your Government Failed You* that the individuals involved in crisis management throughout the 1990s were influenced by political pressures to “‘do something’ about security through bureaucratic reorganization.”²¹ 9/11 gave politicians the perfect opportunity to insist upon organizational change at a federal level, especially change that reflects proactivity and patriotism from their political party and themselves.

One month after the September 11th attacks, the Bush administration established the Office of Homeland Security (OHS), an advisory body that worked directly with the White House to facilitate threat detection efforts, counter-terrorism preparedness, and disaster management. President Bush had appointed Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge as head of the OHS, tasking him with creating a national strategy to defend the U.S. against terrorism. The president was hesitant to create an executive-level federal department for homeland security, privately insisting that national security affairs should be within the control of the White House. To Bush, the White House needed to assert itself in security affairs after believing that it was left out of key conversations between intelligence communities - and creating a prominent executive office who directly answers to the president was an effective way of earning back respect.²²

²¹ Richard A. Clarke, *Your Government Failed You: Breaking the Cycle of National Security Disasters*.

²² “Dispute Casts Cloud over Counterterrorism Sessions.”

Another factor that decreased the possibility of homeland security being elevated to a cabinet-level department by the Bush administration was the refusal from the White House to allow Ridge to testify in front of Congress. Senate Democrats, particularly Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Byrd (D-WV), were determined to have Ridge formally testify on efforts to enhance the nation's security and effectively confront newfound threats. However, consistent with its strategy of keeping matters of national security within the purview of the White House, the Bush administration insisted that Ridge acted as an advisor with no operational or budgetary authority. Therefore, he cannot be compelled to testify in front of Congress, unlike Cabinet secretaries and other various administration leaders. Creating a new department would also directly contradict the administration's emphatic insistence on smaller government and cutting federal spending. Therefore, the White House was determined for homeland security matters to begin and end with the Office of Homeland Security - not the *Department of Homeland Security*.

While the Republican-led administration was determined to keep matters of homeland security strictly within the control of the president, Congressional Democrats had different ideas. Immediately after 9/11, Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT) announced his plan to create an executive department that placed various national security-related agencies under what Lieberman deemed a "single administrative umbrella."²³ Lieberman's idea was to construct the "Department of National Homeland Security" out of various agencies that were scattered across the government, including the U.S. Border Patrol, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the U.S. Coast Guard, and more. He insisted that Ridge would not be able to construct

²³ Mindy Finn, "Lieberman Announces Plan for Homeland Security."

a comprehensive and informed national security response to the attacks without both spending authority and a thorough reorganization of national-security related agencies. Ridge could have both with a new cabinet-level department. The idea of homeland security becoming a cabinet issue already caused enough of a headache for the Bush administration, But what was most alarming was the public perception of Lieberman's legislative advancements. On May 2nd, 2002, Lieberman and his colleagues introduced S.1449, the National Homeland Security and Combating Terrorism Act of 2002.²⁴ Bush and his senior staff feared that the legislation, if passed, would be known as "The Lieberman Act."²⁵ As a Republican who touts having strong national security as a core plank and a president who is overseeing an entire country's response to the most deadly terrorist attack in history, Bush could not allow for the public to believe that Democrats were more supportive of national security than Republicans. The potential of a Democrat-led homeland security plan, combined with continuous insistence for Ridge to testify in front of Congress, made the Bush White House flip their position on the creation of a homeland security department. Suddenly, homeland security became a cabinet-level issue.

Quickly, the White House began to construct their own version of Lieberman's bill. H.R. 5005 was given the name "The Homeland Security Act of 2002," promptly putting Republicans at the helm of all matters related to national security legislation. When analyzing the White House's version of Lieberman's legislation, it becomes apparent that "about ninety-five per cent [sic] of it is exactly the same as Lieberman's." Like Lieberman, Bush and his officials devised to consolidate entities such as the Coast Guard, the Secret Service, and FEMA. The Homeland Security Act's main goal was to improve communication between agencies and facilitate

²⁴ James Clark Gilles, "Bush, Ridge, Rove & the Creation of the Department of Homeland Security."

²⁵ United States Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General and Glenn A. Fine, "A Review of the FBI's Handling of Intelligence Information Related to the September 11 Attacks."

cooperation between entities that have not frequently worked together in the past. In his bill, Lieberman kept in mind the numerous intelligence and communication failures that happened before 9/11 that allowed the plans to form undetected and argued that merging numerous distinct agencies with their own intelligence offices into one department would prevent another communication catastrophe. Bush's team had the same concerns, summarizing their desire for enhanced communication in their final version of the bill. According to the Homeland Security Act, the Secretary of the newly created department would have the responsibility of "coordinating, and, as appropriate, consolidating, the Federal Government's communications and systems of communications relating to homeland security with State and local government personnel, agencies, and authorities, the private sector, other entities, and the public." However, one major difference marked a prominent difference between what was suggested by Lieberman and the legislation proposed by the White House. Lieberman's bill included various protections and rights for federal workers, while the White House's version of the bill was absent of any mention of workers' rights. While Lieberman knew that there was still a chance to fight to place explicit mention of workers' rights in the White House's version of the bill, he also knew that constructing an effective and efficient government apparatus dedicated to securing the country was a popular political topic. Therefore, opposing a critical homeland security bill would cause his reputation to become unfavorable amongst civilians on both sides of the aisle. Minor changes suggested by the Democrats were made to H.R. 5005 while it was being debated in Congress. After months of negotiations and partisan bickering, a single stroke from the president's pen on November 25th, 2002, set into motion the construction of one of the most complicated and nuanced bureaucratic structures in the U.S. government: the United States Department of Homeland Security.

Organization Theory

In this section, it will be discussed how Max Weber's theories regarding bureaucracy, economics, and labor gave future academics greater understanding into how organizations operate in a modern and globalized world. Dr. Robert Merton advances Weber's ideas, adding a political dimension to Weber's ideas on bureaucracy by stating that bureaucracies' interactions with political entities allow for the proliferation of political objectives and attitudes within an organization. This section concludes with a summary of the progression of organization theory scholarship in the context of military structures and systems, highlighting the works of notable organization theory academics such as Dr. Graham Allison, Dr. Barry Posen, and Dr. Scott Sagan.

Weber

When German sociologist Max Weber created his famous Theory of Bureaucracy, he compared the inner workings of German and American organizations in both the public and private sector to understand what qualities made certain groups and individuals successful in a modern capitalist world. In one of his most famous works, *Economy and Society*, Weber declared that bureaucracies in the public sector - characterized by a rigid hierarchy, a sense of tradition, a strict chain of command, and a continued fulfillment of tasks/duties - are key to the capitalist economy.²⁶ Weber's version of a bureaucracy envisioned an impersonal and apolitical administrative entity whose actions were highly predictable. Weber's theory on bureaucracy is highly touted to this day - many modern bureaucracies, both private and public are stunningly "Weberian." They are filled with corporate boardrooms and administrative offices, supported by

²⁶ Max Weber, Tony Waters, and Dagmar Waters, *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society New Translations on Politics, Bureaucracy, and Social Stratification*.

legions of employees, all of whom answer to someone directly superior to them, who also answer to someone directly superior to them, and so on. Weber argues that bureaucracy is how the Western world “rationalizes” itself, adjusting social and economic policies to reflect an increased focus on efficiency and predictability. This rationalization occurred to support the industrial processes associated with an increasingly globalized capitalist economy. As more people, organizations, and countries became interconnected, there arose a need for greater efficiency and standardization in industrial processes to continue creating output to satisfy growing demand. To Weber, bureaucracy is “technically the most advanced means for wielding power in the hands of those who possess it.”²⁷ However, bureaucracy and the behaviors associated with bureaucracy have not been as rational, apolitical, impersonal, or as orderly as Weber had hoped. In many organizations, their bureaucracies were almost the exact opposite.

Merton

American sociologist Dr. Robert K. Merton, in his 1957 work *Social Theory and Social Structure*, advances Weber’s theory on bureaucracy. Merton states that there are often no public discussions of bureaucracy’s techniques or operating procedures, for the sake of security and stability.²⁸ However, there may be public discussion related to its policies. Merton differs from Weber in that he does believe that bureaucracies can be political in nature, as they interact with political actors and groups to achieve their goals. He explains that for a wide range of duties to be performed and completed by such a large number of individuals, discipline amongst its ranks and staff is paramount. Discipline, in the context of Merton’s explanation, can only be impactful “if the ideal patterns are buttressed by strong sentiments which entail devotion to one’s duties, a

²⁷ Kim, “Max Weber.”

²⁸ Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*.

keen sense of the limitation of one's authority and competence, and methodical performance of routine activities.”²⁹ The only way to instill this discipline is to be actively “infusing group participants with appropriate attitudes and sentiments.”¹⁷ While this discipline-centered plan seems promising initially, there are consequences associated with this plan of action. When discipline, rigidity, and inflexibility are enforced too strictly during every step of every process in an organization, focus turns away from the *achievement* of a goal and more towards the *processes* that are undertaken to work towards a goal. Merton insists that conforming to rules and expectations overrides the success of a mission, leading to the emergence of infamous bureaucratic “red tape.” He deems this change in expectations a “displacement of goals.”

In his work on bureaucracies, Merton also explains economist Thorstein Veblen’s idea of “trained incapacity.” When training occurs in bureaucracies, preparation for different scenarios and situations often occurs under favorable conditions. Each individual in a bureaucracy is given a specified role tailored to their talents and training. Merton argues that the training bureaucracies do not adequately prepare individuals to perform any task outside of their job description. This is an example of what Veblen labels as “trained incapacity.” An individual in a bureaucracy only knows how to perform and complete the exact job meant for them, with little room for interpretation or flexibility. Bureaucracies understand that they must make impactful changes to their training to account for these variations, and attempt to do so, but often fall short of producing effective outcomes. Instead, bureaucracies make “maljudgements,” with Merton explaining that “Actions based upon training and skills which have been successfully applied in the past may result in inappropriate responses *under changed conditions*. An inadequate

²⁹ Veblen, *The Instinct of Workmanship and the Industrial Arts*.

flexibility in the application of skills will, in a changing milieu, result in more or less serious maladjustments.”¹⁷ Bureaucracies make mistakes in the adjustments that they choose for their staff, creating greater confusion and disorder in the organization.

Allison

Scholarship surrounding bureaucracies and the socialization that occurs within bureaucracies began to be applied to fields outside of sociology and economics in the latter half of the 20th century. The need to analyze and understand how bureaucracies functioned became a mission for military and defense analysts, as they sought to understand the militaries that were suddenly entrusted with the possession of nuclear weapons. The devastating and catastrophic results of the detonation of atomic bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the close of World War II gave researchers and analysts new reasons to want to understand how decisions are made and how socialization occurs within militaries. As nuclear weapons were introduced into modern international politics, the need for understanding how militaries and their leaders operated became prominent. Given their vast number of individuals - all of whom have specified roles and positions, bound by honor and tradition, and instructed with discipline - militaries began to be seen by psychologists, sociologists, and political scientists alike as being bureaucratic organizations.

One of the first authors to make the direct connection between organization and military bureaucracies is political scientist and former dean of Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, Dr. Graham Allison. In 1971, Allison wrote the book *The Essence of Decision*, which analyzed the organizational decision-making processes that guided the United States during the Cuban Missile Crisis. In his book, Allison specifies that individuals and

organizations who need to make choices utilize “comprehensive rationality,”³⁰ which consists of the generation of all possible alternatives, understanding the consequences of each alternative, and analyzing the impacts of those consequences on the individual or organization’s efforts to achieve their goals. However, it is oftentimes not time-efficient nor possible for an individual or organization to completely understand and analyze every consequence of every alternative when assessing the best solutions for a problem. Therefore, decision-makers utilize “bounded rationality,”¹⁹ which employs simplified models that make it possible to understand the most pivotal parts of a problem without gathering the entirety of that problem’s complexity. He notes that a lack of rationality - bounded or not - creates uncertainty for organizations, from both external and internal sources.

Allison describes the simplifying measures conducted, including “factored problems,” “satisficing,” and “uncertainty avoidance.”¹⁹ Allison defines “factored problems” as the act of organizations separating different components of a singular problem and assigning those components to the most appropriate subunits in an organization. “Satisficing” occurs when organizations choose alternatives that are simply “good enough” rather than the best possible courses of action. Allison underlines this point by stating that, in order to save time, effort, and resources, organizations are happy to find *a* needle in a haystack rather than only the *sharpest* needle in the haystack. He goes on to describe what he calls “uncertainty avoidance,”¹⁹ which describes how organizations rely on relatively prompt corrective action to rectify uncertainty. Allison compares this particular process to a thermostat in a home: thermostats automatically

³⁰ Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*.

adjust themselves based on the current temperature of the home at that very moment, not based on the temperature a few hours or days later.

Further along in his writing, Allison describes what he calls the “organizational process paradigm,”¹⁹ which is a pattern of behaviors that organizations display in an effort to accomplish their tasks. Much of the paradigm he describes is derived from his previous explanations of organizations’ simplifying measures, however, Allison introduces a critical process for organizations: the creation and operation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). SOPs are previously-designed routines that organizations carry out to confront problems in a concerted fashion. Allison explains that there is a large degree of variation between SOPs. Some SOPs are “simply conventions”³¹ that display how to operate different kinds of machinery. Other SOPs are far more grounded in the traditions and norms of an organization and have greater degrees of complexity to them, such as battle strategies or training regimens.

Halperin

The contributions of Dr. Morton Halperin, who expanded upon Allison’s work on organization theory, advanced the field of study of bureaucratic politics in the national security sector. Halperin’s work added greater specificity to the identities of the most important actors in the national security arena - mainly “the president, political appointees, career bureaucrats, and organizations.” Halperin also founded the notion of “organizational essence” in his 1971 article *Why Bureaucrats Play Games*. According to Halperin, an organization’s essence consists of how an organization interprets its mission and purpose, and what action that organization is meant to undertake in order to fulfill its mission and purpose. He includes several examples of how

³¹ Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*.

individuals understand their organization's essence, such as how U.S. Air Force officers understand that the Air Force's mission is to undertake efforts to advance the transportation of nuclear weapons, organize strategic bombing missions, and intercept enemy supply channels. However, critics have noted that Halperin's work does not expand on "how much bureaucratic politics truly matter within the foreign policy-making process," leaving it to future scholars to determine the strength of bureaucratic politics and behaviors in the national security arena.

Posen

Dr. Barry Posen, one of the nation's preeminent national security experts and director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Security Studies Program, built on Allison's initial assertions regarding organization theory in his book *The Sources of Military Doctrine*. Posen states that organizations are created to fulfill specific purposes for specific goals - organizations coordinate and plan to accomplish their missions and reduce uncertainty. The need to coordinate and plan amongst employees - especially large swaths of employees, such as the U.S. military - requires bureaucracy. However, Posen asserts that bureaucracies are not all the same. A variety of needs and purposes requires a variety of bureaucratic structures; as Posen argues, the bureaucratic structures needed to effectively operate research and development are markedly different from the structures needed to manufacture steel. However, bureaucratic structure does not automatically create rationality. Individuals are not machines, as their productivity is not linear, and the outcomes of their work are not entirely predictable and without fail. This is because, as Posen suggests, individuals seek more than wages from their professions. They seek "power, authority, prestige, deference, good fellowship,"²⁰ which threatens any assurance of rationality within organizations.

Posen concurs with Allison by stating that the lack of rationality creates external and internal uncertainty for an organization, which organizations attempt to discontinue. In order to quell uncertainty and accommodate everyday tasks, organizations develop routines, invoking the same term as Allison - standard operating procedures (SOPs). When Posen argues that “Organizations develop preferred ways of doing things in order to control and coordinate the contributions of large numbers of sub-units,”²⁰ the SOPs are an organization’s preferred methods of operation. These routines are often deeply ingrained in an organization, leading to potential challenges for any retraining or reorganization efforts.

Individuals in organizations, according to Posen, are “trained, rewarded, and promoted according to a particular way of doing business.”²⁰ They are taught the same SOPs as individuals before them, learning how to confront both emergencies and day-to-day operations according to tradition and what has, in the past, been proven to be effective and efficient. Posen calls this repetition of training procedures, development, and advancement “socialization.”²⁰ Individuals in organizations undergo the same processes of socialization over time, causing SOPs and individuals to become what Posen labels as “institutionalized,”²⁰ noting that these institutionalized processes may outlive their intended purposes. As the institutionalization of people and processes persist within an organization, individual actors develop “parochial priorities and perceptions” to ensure that institutionalization continues.

To reduce uncertainty in an environment, organizations utilize SOPs. An example of a sub-unit conducting an SOP that was invoked by Posen would be the continued operation of an outdated unit or process, especially because of distrust for other sub-units. A notable model of this is the U.S. Marine Corps’ insistence on operating its own air force due to incidents involving the U.S. Navy’s air force flaws in World War II. Despite the decades between the modern day

and World War II, SOPs derived from the lessons learned from World War II “convinced the Corps that the Marine rifleman could only depend on a brother Marine for reliable close air support.”²⁰ Another example of organizations utilizing SOPs to reduce uncertainty would be conducting efforts to determine one’s budgets and funding. These efforts are particularly evident in military bureaucracies. Organizations understand that, to expand their budgets, they must be able to innovate. New technologies - especially for warfare - require new (and larger) budgets. Organizations continuously innovate, expanding their budgets through continuous budget requests for additional funding. Additional funding, in turn, maximizes an organization’s autonomy through creating greater power and control for them.

Sagan

The collection of these paradigms and theories regarding the behaviors, routines, and proclivities of organizations has taken the label of “organization theory.” While numerous political scientists and analysts have contributed to organization theory throughout the last several decades, one of the most major bodies of work that utilized organization theory has been Dr. Scott D. Sagan’s 1994 journal article *The Perils of Proliferation*. Sagan is a political scientist and co-director of Stanford University’s Center for International Security and Cooperation, who wrote *The Perils of Proliferation* to analyze the relationship between organization theory and the proliferation of nuclear weapons around the world. Like Allison and Posen, Sagan emphasizes how organizations reduce uncertainty, create specialized routines and plans to conduct processes. Sagan also emphasizes the tendency for organizations to “satisfice”³² instead of aiming for a solution that is maximally appealing, both strategically and materially. However, Sagan gives

³² Scott D. Sagan, “The Perils of Proliferation: Organization Theory, Deterrence Theory, and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons.”

greater detail on how organizations often employ “biased searches”²¹ when searching for solutions and alternatives for problems, with individuals within organizations relying on their “past experience, recent training, and current responsibility.”²¹ Sagan also describes how, because of the biased searches, organizations develop a sense of “goal displacement.” Organizations become more focused on ensuring that the operational processes they conduct conform to pre-established norms and are politically advantageous rather than focusing on the achievement of their goals.

Sagan’s analysis of organization theory differs from Allison’s and Posen’s in that he gives auxiliary analysis on the political aspects of an organization - especially in terms of conflict and competition. According to Sagan, organization theory explains that conflict within organizations is not because of the characteristics of individuals. Rather, conflict occurs within organizations because their subunits have contrasting interests, many of which are niche and parochial. Because organizations and their subunits have their own narrow and parochial interests, it is common for subunits to conflict with one another. Sagan mentions the example of how weapons systems operators have different interests than their commanders, or how soldiers out in the field have different interests and pursuits than their counterparts at command headquarters. These competitions undercut rationality within organizations, creating doubts over whether organizations can complete their stated goals. Sagan also covers his analysis of an organization’s tendency to develop SOPs, remarking that, in developing routines, military organizations often make those routines “inflexible.”²¹ He states that, instead of individually reasoned decisions, organization theory holds that SOPs and routines govern behavior in both everyday life and when confronting problems. Noting the danger of these tendencies, Sagan states: “Organizational routines impede invulnerability. Poorly designed standard operating

procedures could completely undermine what might otherwise appear to be a survivable military force.”²¹ Parochial interests and inflexible routines are at the forefront of Sagan’s concerns with the behaviors of organizations, particularly military organizations.

Throughout Sagan’s analysis of organization theory, a common theme became apparent: his argument that professional military organizations, because of parochial interests and inflexible routines, exhibit organizational tendencies that lead to greater national security deficiencies. Sagan utilizes this argument in the context of nuclear proliferation and efforts to combat the deployment of nuclear weapons in conflict. First, Sagan pulls from Posen’s argument that members of the military undergo institutionalized socialization, as training procedures, work cultures, professional development, and career advancement are manifested through rigidly traditional processes. Because of this socialization, military members are surrounded by individuals with similar mindsets and outlooks regarding international security and warfare. As militaries are specially trained for warfare and are taught to combat international threats, it is far more likely for them to believe that war is much more imminent than members of the general public. Therefore, military members are more likely to engage in preventative offensive measures, such as detonating a nuclear bomb against an adversary in order to avoid having to be on the defensive.

Sagan emphasizes the danger of professional military organizations acting on parochial tendencies as another example of the peril that organizational behaviors can create, utilizing the example of strategic weapons deployments and the People’s Republic of China. In 1964, the PRC successfully tested its first nuclear weapon, causing the U.S. intelligence community to estimate that the PRC would acquire the ability to successfully test and deploy intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) by 1975. On the

contrary, the PRC did not acquire ICBM and SLBM testing capacity until the early 1980s due to inflexible routines and parochial interests employed by the military. First, the division responsible for the development of the PRC's missile capabilities, the Second Artillery Division, consistently requested greater funding for their activities, at the expense of other units. While aggressively pursuing these funds, the Second Artillery Division neglected their duties to expand their existing operational capacities, allowing their research and development progress to stall. Achieving increased funding was a narrow and parochial interest of the Second Artillery Division, causing the PRC to become less secure through neglecting to ensure that its missiles are functional and operational.

Another example of organizational tendencies posing harm to a nation's security through the employment of inflexible routines and outdated standard operating procedures. During the Six Day War in 1967, Egyptian air forces continued to organize its air fleet by crowding planes close together on its main airfield in order to launch quickly in the event of an offensive attack, which was the standard operating procedure then. However, Egypt was not anticipating Israel to be the entity to attack first. With planes being crowded together, it was relatively easy for Israel to attack a majority of Egypt's air fleet at once, decimating much of Egypt's air combat capabilities. Egypt's air forces also did not adjust its patrolling schedules in the air at the onset of the war, allowing for Israeli air forces to know exactly when no Egyptian aircraft would be in the air, maximizing its potential to inflict damage upon Egypt's air fleet.

Throughout this thesis, the analysis of organization theory that will be applied most consistently to the analysis of the Department of Homeland Security is the one conducted by Sagan. This is because Sagan's analysis presents a comprehensive compilation of previous security scholars' theories regarding organizational tendencies and Sagan's application of theory

to numerous case studies around the world. By applying theory to practice, Sagan displays the numerous consequences of organizational procedures and pathologies on professional militaries. While Allison and Posen also touched on the implications of organizational pathologies on military readiness and operational capacities, Sagan's analysis is the most detailed in terms of the examination of the impact of organizational interests and routines on the outcomes of various conflicts. The two observations featured in Sagan's analysis of organizational pathologies that will be used most throughout this thesis are the tendency for organizations to deploy inflexible routines and standard operating procedures to the detriment to their missions and the consistent pursuit of parochial and self-gratifying interests of subunits within an organization. While the DHS and its subunits certainly do not conform to organizational pathologies in the same manner that professional militaries do, in assessing the evidence, it is discernible that the DHS employs inflexible routines and follows parochial interests while conducting both its everyday functions and in emergency situations, compromising the safety of millions of Americans that the department has sworn to protect.

Parochial Interests Exacerbating Interagency Non-Cooperation and Budget Irresponsibility

Duplication and Fragmentation

When analyzing government budgets, it is helpful to examine the notions of “duplication” and “fragmentation.” According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Congressional entity tasked with analyzing and investigating the effectiveness and efficiency of the federal government and its services, duplication occurs when multiple government offices, agencies, or departments engage in the *same* activities to provide for the *same* mission.³³ An example of duplication would be two different branches of the military buying 10 tanks each for a specific battle, making the total number of tanks the military possesses to be 20. However, the battle only necessitated having 10 tanks total, rendering the extra 10 tanks a waste of money. Fragmentation occurs when federal departments or agencies participate in *separate activities* for the same mission. In its 2023 report on duplication and fragmentation within the federal government, the GAO found that the DHS’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis did not share its list of domestic terrorism incidents with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) despite an intelligence sharing agreement between the two entities.³⁴ In fact, the FBI was not even aware that such a list existed. It relied on its own resources and intelligence to put together historical data related to domestic terrorism attacks. Despite the two organizations working towards the same mission - mitigating and preventing domestic terrorism - both utilized time and resources to work towards the mission separately and without communication. It should be noted that many

³³ United States Government Accountability Office, “2023 Annual Report: Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Billions of Dollars in Financial Benefits.”

³⁴ United States Government Accountability Office, “Domestic Terrorism: Further Actions Needed to Strengthen FBI and DHS Collaboration to Counter Threats.”

government agencies, departments, and entities experience duplication and fragmentation.

Between 2011 and 2021, the Government Accountability Office published 11 reports outlining necessary steps to reduce duplication and fragmentation across the entire federal government, resulting in the saving of \$515 billion. However, the degree of duplication and fragmentation in the DHS is extreme relative to the rest of the federal government.

Despite its creators' intentions of making it a fully integrated and unified department with comprehensive communication across all agencies, the DHS has struggled to achieve timely cooperation between many of its entities. A lack of communication and cooperation proliferated throughout the department, as various different agencies with very different histories - some with multiple-century stories, others just created - struggled to see eye to eye. This lack of cooperation allowed inefficient budgeting to immediately hamper the department, manifesting itself in the forms of duplication and fragmentation. One of the most useful theories for analyzing the DHS and its operations is recognition from organization theory that organizations, because of their conflicting parochial interests, often come into conflict with another. This conflict interrupts effective and consistent communication, as organizations struggle to agree on budgets, missions, operational procedures, and more. Parochial interests emerge out of differences in organizational essences, as individuals believe that an organization cannot deviate from what are perceived to be foundational missions. Therefore, organizations develop parochial interests to ensure that these missions continue. Budgeting has often been at the forefront of episodes of miscommunication and conflict between subunits of the DHS due to different subunits' parochial interests. A lack of cohesive budgeting has allowed for parochial interests and visions regarding how to achieve success and victory to thrive, causing greater detriment to the department.

Miscommunication Between USCG and CBP

In 2017, USCG Lieutenant Jim Dolbow and USCG Captain Jim Howe wrote an article entitled *Shift the Coast Guard to the DOD* in the U.S. Naval Institute's monthly magazine *Proceedings*. Dolbow and Howe are explicit in how they feel about the Coast Guard's placement in the DHS: "Being the only military service among civilian law enforcement and administrative agencies dulls the service's warrior edge."³⁵ Dolbow and Howe go on to emphasize that the Coast Guard and the DHS do not have nearly enough in common in terms of operational requirements, training regimes, culture, and more to warrant the Coast Guard being placed under the supervision of DHS. Being at the Department of Defense (DOD) would expand USCG's access to resources, enhance its research capabilities, and advance its acquisition programs. Dolbow and Howe are not the only ones who share these sentiments. The attitude that the USCG does not "belong" in the DHS has had reverberating consequences in the forms of communication breakdowns, duplicative spending, and an overall lack of cohesion inside the department. A notable example of tensions between agencies and departments boiling over within the DHS is the strained relationship between the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Coast Guard. According to USCG Vice Admiral Peter V. Neffenger, "Coast Guard and CBP would find themselves in competition in maritime drug interdiction. I'd get a kick out of seeing operational Coast Guard officers saying, 'That was *our* drug bust, not CBP's'...those guys always want to take the credit at the local level."³⁶ However, infighting between the CBP and the USCG expands far past territorial rivalries. The infighting between the two entities is not only counterintuitive, but expensive.

³⁵ Jim Dolbow and Jim Howe, "Shift the Coast Guard to DoD."

³⁶ Amanda Chicago-Lewis, "The 20-Year Boondoggle."

In 2017, former DHS Inspector General John Roth testified before the House of Representatives' Committee on Homeland Security about his oversight of the DHS and its expenses. In the testimony, Roth revealed a stunning statistic. According to a 2013 audit, both the (CBP) and the Coast Guard were due to upgrade their H-60 helicopters. Roth revealed that the two entities had the opportunity to coordinate their helicopter upgrades together to save money and enhance efficiency. However, according to Roth, "CBP was unwilling to coordinate with the Coast Guard to upgrade its H-60 helicopters, even though both components were converting the same helicopters."³⁷ The subsequent audit found that the CBP and the USCG would have saved \$126 million if they had coordinated their upgrades instead of upgrading helicopters - that technically belonged to the U.S. Army - independently, resulting in duplicative spending. USCG Vice Admiral Neffenger commented on the duplicative spending, stating: "I don't know why we fly multiple air forces in the department. I don't know why we have multiple boat forces..."²² Neffenger went on to explain that conflicts between agencies and departments over equipment and resources amounts to "a silly expensive fight."²²

One of the core tenets of organization theory as it relates to militaries is the pursuit of intensely political and narrow-minded goals, often resulting in a buildup of military capacities and weapons arsenals. Almost nothing is more political than government budgeting. Sagan states that "Organizations are often myopic; instead of surveying the entire environment for information, organizational members have biased searches, focusing only on specific areas stemming from their past experience, recent training, and current responsibility." Like military organizations, the DHS and its subcomponents continually seek greater resources and budgetary

³⁷ Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, "Securing the Maritime Border: The Future of CBP Air and Marine."

additions. It has been continually ingrained in administrators and staff that victory is assured through the continued acquisition of resources - in a military context, in the form of bigger budgets, a greater number of missiles, more complex weapons, and enhanced technology. The same can be said for employees at the DHS, many of whom have military and federal government experience. In the past, greater acquisition of resources has steadily resulted in victories in various theaters. In 1945, defense spending constituted nearly 40% of the country's GDP.³⁸ From 1939 to 1945, over 100,000 tanks and armored vehicles were constructed, over 300,000 aircrafts were built, and 200 submarines were deployed.²⁴ With the war ending in victory, military leadership again requested greater budgets and more weapons to aid the fight against communism. According to scholar James M. Cypher, the military practiced "military Keynesianism" from the late 1940s to the late 1970s, bolstering industrial jobs in the US for both servicemembers and civilians that led to the massive buildup of missiles to deter the Soviet Union from attacking NATO members.³⁹ At the height of the Cold War, the U.S. deployed over 1,000 Minuteman ICBMs and 656 submarine-launched ballistic missiles.⁴⁰ In 2020, the U.S. was recorded to have approximately 400 Minuteman ICBMs and 240 submarine-launched ballistic missiles.⁴¹ With the Cold War ending in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and a breakdown of communism in previously Soviet-influenced areas, American leaders began to determine that a plethora of resources and money was critical to any victorious effort - even when it does not make sense to continue building up resources. The managers of each subcomponent of the DHS began to think similarly, agreeing that the continued acquisition of resources and bigger budgets

³⁸ "The Cost of U.S. Wars Then and Now."

³⁹ James M. Cypher, "Military Spending after the Cold War."

⁴⁰ William Burr, "How Many and Where Were the Nukes?"

⁴¹ United States Department of Defense, "America's Nuclear Triad."

makes victory far likelier. However, constant procurement of resources and money by themselves does not ensure success and can even be detrimental to the mission of an agency.

Other Cases of DHS Duplication/Fragmentation: FPS and R&D

The need to constantly procure resources and money has led to various disagreements between agencies and entities in the DHS, along with increased confusion across the department overall. In the earlier section of this chapter, the CBP and the USCG engaged in a bitter dispute over helicopter upgrades. The case over the performance of security assessments is another prominent example of how the constant acquisition of resources sometimes does more harm than good. The Federal Protective Agency (FPS), a subagency of the DHS, is the entity primarily responsible for maintaining the security of federal government buildings. It also conducts security and risk assessments on buildings for government agencies interested in moving locations. Despite requesting and receiving \$236 million from government entities to perform security services, a 2012 DHS testimony stated that various agencies across the federal government paid to conduct their own security and risk assessments, including DHS agencies like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).⁴² This is an example of duplication, when multiple government agencies conduct the same actions to achieve the same goals. Duplication often occurs because agencies want to advocate for bigger budgets and more advanced resources to achieve victory - allowing their parochial image of what “success” is to override logical or efficient plans to combat a problem.

Despite the department’s prominent role in security research, it was found in a 2013 GAO report that the DHS “does not have a Department-wide policy defining research and

⁴² Cathleen A. Berrick, “Department of Homeland Security: Actions Needed to Reduce Overlap and Potential Unnecessary Duplication, Achieve Cost Savings, and Strengthen Mission Functions.”

development (R&D) or guidance directing components how to report R&D activities.”⁴³ With no standardization process occurring and with communication between agencies failing, agencies began to conduct research and studies without coordinating with each other. With no guidance, the report found that the DHS did not know how much money it invested into its agencies for R&D. With agencies grasping for money to achieve victory, the GAO found that nearly \$255 million were not checked by department headquarters before being distributed to DHS agencies in FY11.²⁹ The GAO also found that there were multiple cases of duplication throughout the DHS in terms of R&D.

The cases of duplication and fragmentation within the DHS display how parochial interests interfere with an organization’s ability to effectively operate. An organization’s subunits have various and differing organizational essences, which their workers believe are foundational to the very identities of the subunits themselves. To ensure that these organizational essences are maintained, organizations develop parochial interests and solely focus on satisfying those interests. These insular worldviews within organizational subunits create conflict between these subunits, resulting in duplicative spending, fragmentation, and budgetary miscommunication, which results in wasteful spending and takes away funding for effective security programs.

⁴³ “Cutting DHS Duplication and Wasteful Spending: Implementing Private Sector Best Practices and Watchdog Recommendations.”

How Inflexible Routines Aggravate Security Theater Within the TSA

One of the major themes of organization theory is that organizations tend to conduct their operations within what Sagan calls a “bounded”³⁰ form of rationality. To understand uncertainty in the world, organizations must rely on simplifying mechanisms and limits on calculations in order to achieve results in the most efficient and time-oriented way possible. Therefore, organizations frequently aim to “satisfice,”³⁰ accepting any result that is satisfactory and meets operational requirements - even if success is not achieved. Sagan explains that, rather than take the time and resources to maximize utility and seek effectiveness, organizations would rather embrace results that are “minimally satisfying.”³⁰ Throughout its years in operation, the TSA has been accused of operating to achieve what is minimally satisfying, conducting ineffective operations designed by senior management and referring individuals to law enforcement through race profiling and discrimination.

Subunits such as the TSA have gotten so accustomed to conducting operations meant to minimally satisfy that these operations become synonymous with procedures meant to advance organizational essence. When the TSA’s operational essence is to search passengers and luggage for contraband in order to advance safe and secure air travel, procedures for those searches become central to the TSA’s own identity. To continue conducting procedures that are minimally satisfying, the TSA resists attempts to adjust its training and methods while continually insisting that its procedures are effective, further ingraining their methodologies into its own operational essence. Many airports across the country publish security-related statistics annually to assert that their methodologies are effective at preventing violence in the air, insisting that attempts to change their patterns of operation are encroachments on the TSA’s foundational missions. The TSA’s continued defense of its procedures and resumption of its “normal” passenger and

luggage search routines renders these routines inflexible, as the more time that passes and the more these routines are fervently defended, the more ingrained they are into the organization's essence.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, many questions arose concerning how to best secure the nation's airways and air travel passengers. Officials knew that after 19 terrorists hijacked four commercial planes headed to domestic destinations, the public would be very hesitant to board planes again. Gallup polls conducted immediately after the attacks showed that "43% of Americans saying they were less willing to fly on airplanes, 35% were less willing to go into skyscrapers, 30% were less willing to attend events where there are thousands of people, and 48% were less willing to travel overseas."⁴⁴ To establish a greater sense of security for travelers, the Congress and the Bush administration created the Aviation and Transportation Security Act in November 2001, which expanded the operations of Federal Air Marshals, required all baggage to be screened, and created the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).⁴⁵

Ineffective TSA Passenger and Luggage Search Procedures

Since its creation, interacting with the TSA has become a common and necessary experience for all air travelers. TSA officers (TSOs) scan carry-on and checked baggage, operate metal detectors and full-body screening devices, monitor for explosives, and secure airports. With 60,000 officers operating in airports and transportation facilities across the country⁴⁶, the TSA has a prolific presence in air travel. Despite their mission being to secure and protect air travelers, the TSA has often drawn the ire of the American public due to accusations that they

⁴⁴ Jeffrey M. Jones, "More in U.S. Say American Lives Permanently Changed by 9/11."

⁴⁵ United States Transportation Security Administration, "Transportation Security Timeline."

⁴⁶ United States Transportation Security Administration, "Leadership and Organization."

invade privacy and harass passengers. As part of its screening process, the TSA is allowed to remove and examine any of the passengers' items located in luggage. They are also permitted to conduct full-body pat-downs and test for bomb residue on an individual's body. There have been several reports conducted by both the federal government and private companies that state that the TSA's body-screening technology and its behavioral detection program contribute to racial profiling and discrimination.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, it is debatable whether or not many TSA's operations that make them vulnerable to public criticism are even effective in securing the country.

Throughout the course of its operations, the TSA frequently focuses on "doable missions." The most prominent example of the TSA settling with what is easiest instead of what is most effective is the choice of items the TSA confiscates. In his book *Permanent Emergency*, former TSA Administrator Kip Hawley states that the agency has begun to only focus on finding and seizing prohibited items. While finding prohibited items is one of its main goals, the *types* of prohibited items that the TSA routinely finds - and misses - is vehemently concerning. The TSA focuses on items that are relatively easy to find yet have little potential to aid a potential terrorist in creating a mass casualty situation. Various items the TSA banned passengers carrying onto the plane throughout the years include certain brands of stiletto shoes, cigarette lighters, foam toy swords, hardware tools of any kind, any length of scissors, sporting equipment such as hockey sticks, snow globes larger than a tennis ball, and more.⁴⁸ Many of these bans were appealed - much to the joy of snow globe enthusiasts - but items such as Fiskar scissors, lighters, and

⁴⁷ United States Government Accountability Office, "Aviation Security: TSA Does Not Have Valid Evidence Supporting Most of the Revised Behavioral Indicators Used in Its Behavior Detection Activities."

⁴⁸ Shawna Malvini Redden, *101 Pat-Downs: An Undercover Look at Airport Security and the TSA*.

pocketknives are still prohibited. However, while TSOs can easily and confidently confiscate lighters and knives, even more dangerous objects have shown to be harder to detect.

TSOs have become so effective at spotting innocuous items that could be utilized as weapons that many officers have completely disregarded other dangerous objects in passengers' luggage. Even with its sophisticated technology and the manpower it utilizes to screen passengers, the TSA has alarming performance statistics. In 2015, the DHS sent undercover investigators possessing contraband - including weapons and bombs - through security checkpoints at various airports. TSOs failed to identify 95% of the contraband that made its way through security. When the investigation was done again in 2017, its failure rate of approximately 80% was seen as an improvement.⁴⁹ In 2019, a whistleblower affiliated with the TSA alleged that the TSA has systematically relaxed various security procedures in airports to accommodate for increasing wait times. The whistleblower, Jay Brainard, outlined several ways in which the TSA has undermined security for the sake of speed, including: having metal detectors operate in a "reduced-sensitivity" setting that could allow weapons to be undetectable, screening officers for colorblindness, and allowing for individuals with medical devices to do "self pat-downs."³⁹ TSOs also let unvetted passengers utilize the TSA Precheck line, a program that typically requires individuals to undergo an extensive background investigation before being approved. Brainard insisted that the dismal results from undercover investigations and poor performance from TSO are not the fault of the officers themselves, but their management: "The officers are doing precisely what senior leadership tells them to do," adding, "[TSOs] get scapegoated every time there's a [DHS undercover team] report that comes out about our

⁴⁹ Rene Marsh and Robert Kuznia, "CNN Exclusive: Whistleblower Says US Airports Becoming Unsafe as TSA Relaxes Security Measures in Favor of Speeding up Lines."

abysmal testing results.”³⁹ The TSOs can only rely on their past experiences and their training, which is formed by the directions given by senior management. When the senior management prioritizes objectives that are not consistent with the mission of protecting Americans, the training given will only seek to “satisfice” - not excel.

Findings Regarding the TSA’s Behavioral Detection Program

Another one of the TSA’s operations that aims to “satisfice” is its behavioral detection program. In 2007, the TSA created the Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques (SPOT) program, staffed by behavior detection officers, that are supposed to look for physical and physiological signs of distress, despair, or nervousness that raise suspicion. In 2015, the set of 92 behavioral cues that the TSA looks for when assessing whether there is a suspicious individual was leaked to the press. While some behaviors cited are understandably concerning to officers (appearing to be in disguise, asking specific questions about security procedures), there are other behaviors that appear rather innocuous. News outlets reported on several seemingly random behavioral cues, such as excessive yawning and fidgeting.⁵⁰ The TSA had cast a wide net in terms of categorizing what behaviors were potentially threatening, neglecting to narrow down which behaviors were scientifically proven to potentially indicate criminal activity.

The publication of the behavioral cues led both the public and the government to want more information regarding the program’s effectiveness. The GAO published a report in 2013 concluding that the available published and peer-reviewed research did not support the utilization of the techniques outlined in the SPOT program, ultimately recommending for the TSA to limit the program’s funding.³⁶ Racial profiling has also frequently become an issue for the program. A Congressional hearing in 2013 found that the TSA’s behavior detection officers are promoted

⁵⁰ Cora Currier and Jana Winter, “Exclusive: TSA’s Secret Behavior Checklist to Spot Terrorists.”

based on how many individuals they refer to law enforcement.⁵¹ This has served as an incentive for officers to “satisfice” to complete their referral duties, oftentimes through pulling aside non-Caucasian passengers. The officers had technically done their jobs in referring individuals to law enforcement, but with extremely faulty reasoning. A government investigation found that behavior detection officers at Boston’s Logan International Airport were encouraged to racially profile passengers, as “managers’ demands for high numbers of stops, searches and criminal referrals had led co-workers to target minorities in the belief that those stops were more likely to yield drugs, outstanding arrest warrants or immigration problems.”⁵²

Several officers also went to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), who interviewed the officers about their experiences. ACLU lawyer Sarah Wunsch confirmed suspicions about the relationship between the number of referrals and professional accolades, stating “Selecting people based on race or ethnicity was a way of finding easy marks,” before concluding “It was a notch in your belt.”⁴² The officers had searched for and found the option that was minimally satisfying through a program that is not scientifically supported, creating wasteful spending and further eroding public trust in the very agency sworn to protect every single passenger.

One of organization theory’s most utilized ideas is the notion that organizations create inflexible routines to maintain their organizational essences. Despite repeated attempts by federal investigators to display how the TSA’s passenger and luggage search procedures are flawed, minimal change has been made to ensure that the nation’s air travel can become safer.

⁵¹ Subcommittee on Transportation Security, “TSA’s Spot Program and Initial Lessons From the LAX Shooting.”

⁵² Michael S. Schmidt and Eric Lichtblau, “Racial Profiling Rife at Airport, U.S. Officers Say.”

This is because the TSA has created inflexible routines that are difficult to change or modify, as these routines advance the TSA's organizational essence, meaning that these routines must be maintained for the TSA to continue its operations and keep its identity.

Inflexible Routines Creating DHS Reluctance to Investigate Domestic Terror Threats

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, it would have been hard to imagine that the only threat to the U.S. that could rival internationally coordinated jihadi terrorism would be a threat that stemmed from within the country's own borders and based on white supremacist ideology. However, the death toll from far-right domestic terrorism has steadily increased since the mid-2010s, as fears regarding the economy and the changing demographic composition of the United States became more focused. Violent acts inspired by fascist and white supremacist ideologies, such as the shooting of nine African American individuals at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina⁵³, the killing of eleven Jewish worshippers at the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania⁵⁴, and the murder of 23 individuals at a Walmart in a predominantly Latino community⁵⁵. As far-right violence escalates, the security of many Americans is vulnerable. Individuals are targeted through gun violence, stabbings, bombings, and vehicular manslaughter at a variety of everyday locations, such as supermarkets and grocery stores. It would be logical for a government organization tasked with domestic security, such as the DHS, to begin advancing its operations against far-right domestic terrorism. And, to its credit, the DHS has taken demonstrable steps to halt the spread of ideologies that influence domestic terrorism and prevent further violence. In late 2023, the DHS, with the help of 17 other U.S. government agencies, launched a website with community resources such as information about the radicalization process, along with

⁵³ David Von Drehle, Jay Newton-Small, and Maya Rhodan, "How Do You Forgive a Murder?"

⁵⁴ Campbell Robertson, Christopher Mele, and Sabrina Tavernise, "11 Killed in Synagogue Massacre; Suspect Charged with 29 Counts."

⁵⁵ Rosa Flores, Andi Babineau, and Ray Sanchez, "Man Who Killed 23 People in Texas Walmart Shooting Targeting Latinos Sentenced to 90 Life Terms by Federal Judge."

information about grants the DHS gives to community leaders to prevent terrorism.⁵⁶ The DHS has also highlighted the threat of domestic terrorism and racially motivated attacks in its annual threat assessment, stating the need for the public to be vigilant about the content they consume online. It also periodically issued warnings about threats against specific groups. Last year, the DHS issued a warning that, in the midst of an upcoming election year and copious amounts of misinformation online, violence against faith-based organizations, government buildings, and minority communities would be more likely.⁵⁷ While the department's efforts to counter domestic violent extremism are commendable and the department itself is oftentimes legally limited in what it can and cannot investigate, the past has shown that the DHS had downplayed the threat of domestic terrorism for years, choosing to rely on their past experiences with foreign terrorism and solely focusing on threats from overseas.

Allegations of DHS Lack of Action Regarding Domestic Terrorism

In 2009, DHS employee and career security analyst Daryl Johnson and his small team of domestic terrorism experts published a report entitled *Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment*. Shortly after the report was published, Johnson's superiors rescinded the report and disbanded the team tasked with investigating domestic terrorism. Johnson himself left the DHS a year after the report was rescinded, alleging that he was forced out of the department.⁵⁸

In 2011, the Washington Post reported that, several months into the Obama administration, DHS officials scaled back research and investigations into far-right terrorism.

⁵⁶ United States Department of Homeland Security, "Prevention Resource Finder."

⁵⁷ Julia Ainsley, "DHS Warns of Attacks against Government Buildings, Minority Groups Ahead of 2024 Election."

⁵⁸ Heidi Beirich, "Inside the DHS: Former Top Analyst Says Agency Bowed to Political Pressure."

According to the Post, the DHS “cut the number of personnel studying domestic terrorism unrelated to Islam, canceled numerous state and local law enforcement briefings, and held up dissemination of nearly a dozen reports on extremist groups.”⁵⁹ A 2022 report conducted by the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (HSGAC), chaired by Senator Gary Peters, found that after the 9/11 attacks, counterterrorism resources and efforts were aimed primarily towards foreign terrorist threats. The report argued that while this shift in focus “Resulted in critical successes in preventing attacks in multiple locations across the U.S., they have also led to abuses of civil liberties and a disproportionate focus on international terrorist threats over domestic terrorist threats.”⁶⁰ Senate Peters and his staff discovered that both the DHS and the FBI had failed to collect comprehensive information concerning domestic “terrorism”. In 2019, the HSGAC had requested the DHS to provide information and statistics concerning domestic “terrorism”, but the department stated that “it does not collect specific data on domestic “terrorism”.” This sparseness of information concerning domestic “terrorism” forced the GAO and other federal and state organizations to rely on data from the non-profit and academic sectors, communicating with institutions like the University of Maryland National Consortium for the Study of “terrorism” and Responses to “terrorism”. While many of these institutions are incredibly valuable resources in the effort to address “terrorism”, many utilize different metrics and classifications of “terrorism” and have varying levels of funding, which results in the government relying on conflicting and incomplete data. Having a government entity collect data provides a centralized location to critical information that is routinely checked

⁵⁹ R. Jeffrey Smith, “Homeland Security Department Curtails Home-Grown Terror Analysis.”

⁶⁰ U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, “Mislabelled as a Threat: How the Terrorist Watchlist and Government Screening Practices Impact Americans.”

by analysts and is most up to date. The DHS did not have a centralized location for this critical data, leaving the country exposed and vulnerable to further domestic terrorist attacks.

One of the most impactful consequences of the DHS historically not properly taking into account the dangers of far-right domestic “terrorism” is, as the report by the HSGAC stated, the disproportionate amount of focus towards the prevention of foreign “terrorism” or foreign-inspired “terrorism”. That is not to say that there should be a *lack* of focus on foreign “terrorism”. Countering foreign “terrorism” is a critical function of the U.S. government and should be continuously prioritized in all national security agendas. The tragic losses of life in the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent national periods of mourning, fear, and anguish demonstrate the consequences of not being watchful at all times of the threat of foreign “terrorism”. However, the reality of the threats that the country confronts is not accurately reflected in the funding, resources, and attention allocations by the DHS. According to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the research and development body of the Department of Justice, “Although international terrorist organizations remain a threat, these studies show that domestic extremists continue to be responsible for most terrorist attacks in the United States.”⁶¹ The NIJ affirms the disproportionate response to domestic “terrorism” compared to foreign “terrorism”, explaining “Historically, far fewer resources have been dedicated to the study of domestic extremism, leaving gaps in our understanding about terrorist trends, recruitment and retention processes, and online behaviors.” While various government entities, public policy centers, nonprofits, and other organizations have noticed this historical trend, it begs the question of where and what

⁶¹ Steven Chermak et al., “What NIJ Research Tells Us about Domestic Terrorism.”

exactly did the money and funding go towards in terms of countering foreign “terrorism”, as opposed to being used for domestic “terrorism”?

The Countering Violent Extremism Program (CVE)

A program that has been at the forefront of the department’s efforts to curb “terrorism”, especially foreign-inspired “terrorism”, is actually a domestic program. Created in August 2011 by the Obama Administration and administered by the DHS, the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Initiative sought to engage with local communities across the country and empower community leaders to dissuade individuals from turning to violent extremism and “terrorism”. A report on the constitutionality of the program in the American University Law Review explains, “CVE, on the other hand, targets the ideological recruitment of potential extremists, attempting to focus on and prevent the ‘root causes’ of radicalization and provide ‘off-ramps’ for individuals heading down a path toward potentially committing terrorist acts.”⁶² Efforts conducted under the CVE program include leading creative arts workshops for disadvantaged youth, training religious leaders on communicating with worshippers about the dangers of extremism, and awarding grants under its CVE Grant Program to community organizations dedicated to fighting the proliferation of hate and intolerance. In 2016, Congress gave the CVE Grant Program \$10 million to distribute to local organizations, government entities, and nonprofits focused on fighting “terrorism” and extremism. Organizations that have benefitted from the CVE Grant Program include the Nashville International Center for Empowerment, which provides resources and education to immigrants, the Seattle Police Department, and the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. In May 2021, the DHS announced that the CVE Grant Program would be

⁶² Sarah Chaney Reichenbach, “CVE and Constitutionality in the Twin Cities: How Countering Violent Extremism Threatens the Equal Protection Rights of American Muslims in Minneapolis-St. Paul.”

replaced by the Targeted Violence and “terrorism” Prevention (TVTP) Grant Program. The CVE Initiative as a whole was replaced at the same time by the Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3), who would be in charge of administering TVTP grants.

While the TVTP and the CP3 are well-intentioned structures meant to counter extremism, repeated studies and analyses have shown that the program focuses disproportionately on funding organizations related to mitigating foreign-inspired “terrorism” rather than domestic “terrorism”. From 2009 and 2018, deaths from right-wing “terrorism” comprised 72.3% of extremist-related murders in the US, compared to 23.4% by Islamic extremism - those percentages are not reflected in the composition of grand fund recipients. In both 2020 and 2021, only 3 out of the 37 projects that received funding were focused on preventing domestic “terrorism” specifically. The low number of programs related to countering domestic “terrorism” is not due to a lack of applications - half of the applications for the 2021 grant cycle concerned domestic “terrorism” and ideologies primarily aligned with domestic “terrorism”, such as white supremacy, misogyny, and anti-government ideals. The 3 projects dedicated to countering domestic extremism were also not held to the same standards in the process of reviewing their effectiveness and methodologies as other grant recipients. Life After Hate, a nonprofit dedicated to providing re-entry services for formerly incarcerated white supremacists, was not compelled to give greater specification regarding their services in their application - leading to questions about the methodologies the program utilizes. The DHS also redacted almost every resume of Life After Hate employees, which was not done for nearly any other program that submitted grant applications. Redacting the resumes of Life After Hate employees results in confusion over the employees’ credentials and ability to communicate effectively with inmates holding extremist beliefs. Almost all grant recipients are tasked with addressing both extremist ideology

and violence. However, Missouri State University’s Fuse campaign, another grant recipient, lists its objectives as only tackling extremist ideologies and beliefs, neglecting to explicitly state the need to prevent violence - an oversight that the DHS did not allow for programs relating to foreign-inspired “terrorism”. While the objectives of these organizations are extremely commendable, the inconsistencies regarding the review process for TVTP grant applications are startling.

It should be noted that despite the assessment and analysis levels for grant applications being seemingly different for applicants depending on their organization’s focus, the GAO has expressed concern for the management of the grant program overall. According to a GAO report conducted in February 2021, from 2017 to 2019, the DHS did not document the reasons and criteria for its selections of grant recipients, “making it harder to ensure grantees are selected equitably.”⁶³ The same report noted that “DHS also didn't obtain data on grantee performance, which it needs to assess program effectiveness.” The timeframe of these lapses in analysis is particularly concerning due to the Trump Administration tripling the amount of funds given to law-enforcement agencies under the CVE program, a process beginning in 2017. While law enforcement agencies should play an active role in building relationships with community members to prevent every type of “terrorism”, not subjecting law enforcement applicants for grants presents a serious challenge to the program’s original goal. According to the Brennan Center, “The involvement of [law enforcement] agencies increase the likelihood that these programs will act as a vehicle for intelligence reporting about people and organizations in CVE-

⁶³ United States Government Accountability Office, “Countering Violent Extremism: DHS Needs to Improve Grants Management and Data Collection.”

targeted communities,”⁶⁴ creating concerns over unwarranted surveillance and monitoring of communities.

Surveillance concerns regarding the CVE program were heightened when internal documents uncovered in 2023 reported that the DHS runs a domestic intelligence program called the “Overt Human Intelligence Collection Program” that allows DHS officials to directly speak with virtually anyone in the United States, including “people held in immigrant detention centers, local jails, and federal prison.”⁶⁵ This policy is controversial since it allows officials to bypass discussion with interviewees' lawyers. There is also extensive evidence that government agencies, such as the FBI, have utilized funds from their own CVE-equivalent programs to surveil and monitor minority communities. The DOJ awarded the St. Paul Police Department’s African Immigrant Muslim Coordinated Outreach Program (AIMCOP) a two-year grant with the purpose of gaining trust in Muslim communities before identifying “radicalized individuals...who refuse[d] to cooperate with [its] efforts” and “maintain up-to-date intelligence on these offenders.” DHS funds have also gone towards the Bay Area Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI), which collects data from “at-risk” students regarding their “mental health, child welfare, and juvenile probation data.” The Bay Area UASI does not specify the qualities of an “at-risk” student. While there is no explicitly stated evidence that grant funds administered by the DHS TVTP program directly led to the surveillance of minority communities in the US, the DHS’s operation of the Overt Human Intelligence Collection Program, government agencies’ utilization of surveillance techniques through CVE-equivalent programs, and the activities of

⁶⁴ Faiza Patel and Meghan Koushik, “Countering Violent Extremism.”

⁶⁵ Besty Woodruff Swan, “DHS Has a Program Gathering Domestic Intelligence — and Virtually No One Knows about It.”

successful grant applicants allows there to be reasonable suspicion of DHS-funded surveillance through the CVE program.

The reluctance for DHS officials to properly address the threat of domestic “terrorism”, especially in terms of comprehensive research and funding, is emblematic of Sagan’s assertion that organizations operate within a severely bounded and limited form of rationality, relying on standard operating procedures and rules to dictate their actions. The DHS as an organization has developed routines to specifically address the threat of foreign “terrorism” due to the severity of the 9/11 attack, and those routines have persisted into the present day. Routine has led officials to focus on surveilling and monitoring individuals born in foreign countries, investigate religious locations such as mosques, and increased questioning and interrogation of Americans of Middle Eastern descent.⁶⁶ Following 9/11, the newly created DHS needed to build programs specifically designed to handle foreign “terrorism”, complete with a staff of experts and research material to base their analysis, potential interview questions for suspects, and surveillance methodologies from. The DHS has had two decades to gather information and formulate its numerous counterterrorism strategies to fight against foreign “terrorism”, a gargantuan effort for just one subset of terrorist activity. Routines focused on countering foreign “terrorism” have cemented themselves into DHS operational routines with time, leading to a resistance to pivot towards the countering of domestic “terrorism” - a different subset of “terrorism” that requires more research into how to communicate effectively with suspects, infiltrate hate groups, and secure soft targets.

⁶⁶ Faiza Patel, “The Costs of 9/11’s Suspicionless Surveillance: Suppressing Communities of Color and Political Dissent.”

The National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS)

DHS behavior when addressing domestic “terrorism” is also typical of an organization’s tendency to form a myopic point of view when assessing the realities of a situation. Sagan states, “Instead of surveying an entire environment for information, organizational members have biased searches, focusing only on specific areas stemming from past experience, recent training, and current responsibility.” Given the gravity and intensity of the 9/11 attacks and the gradual progression of international “terrorism” preceding the attacks, for many national security professionals both inside and outside the DHS, the past experiences, recent training, and current responsibilities have been solely focused on foreign “terrorism”. Foreign “terrorism” became not just the focus of specialized counterterrorism experts. Various fields - many of which the DHS relies on for its operations, such as psychology, economics, and medicine - noticed sharp increases in “terrorism”-related research in the years after 9/11.⁶⁷ Other fields that saw smaller but still noticeable increases in “terrorism”-related research include computer science, sociology, and criminology, all of which the DHS involves itself with. 9/11 impacted the research done and consumed by many current and future DHS employees and officials, leading to the creation of myopic worldviews regarding what subset of “terrorism” to focus on. In 2011, the DHS released a report titled *Implementing 9/11 Commission Recommendations: Progress Report 2011*. In the report, the DHS listed areas of its activity that were directly impacted by the 9/11 attacks, including the TSA conducting watchlist matching/immigration status confirmation of aviation passengers, behavioral screening and analysis “based on current intelligence and passengers of interest,”⁶⁸ and rigorous investigation of foreign students entering the United States. One of the

⁶⁷ Brian J Phillips, “How Did 9/11 Affect Terrorism Research? Examining Articles and Authors, 1970–2019.”

⁶⁸ United States Department of Homeland Security, “Implementing 9/11 Commission Recommendations: Homeland Security.”

most blatant examples of overt DHS focusing on solely foreign nationals in its counterterrorism efforts is the creation and operation of the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS). In June 2002, the Bush administration authorized the DHS to construct a database of information concerning the whereabouts and movements of immigrants in the United States from a list of 25 countries, the majority of those having large Muslim populations. Under the program, information such as fingerprints, photographs, and movements within the United States' borders were consistently tracked.⁶⁹ According to the Migration Policy Institute, "From its inception, it was determined that NSEERS would only target male noncitizens of a certain age from predesignated countries."

Operating within a severely bounded form of rationality, the DHS has relied solely on its training to detect and monitor threats of international "terrorism" rather than cultivating multifaceted operational abilities. Despite plentiful evidence that domestic "terrorism", specifically "terrorism" inspired by white supremacy and xenophobia, presents a notable and sophisticated threat to the U.S., the DHS had hesitated to properly address it. The political implications and devastation of the 9/11 attacks were so great that the learned experiences and current missions for DHS personnel have largely continued to be based on foreign threats, leading to DHS operations ignoring substantial threats to the nation's safety and security.

⁶⁹ Muzaffar Chishti and Claire Bergeron, "DHS Announces End to Controversial Post-9/11 Immigrant Registration and Tracking Program."

Recommendations

When assessing the current state of the DHS and analyzing possible options for its reform, one can easily pick an extreme: the notion that the DHS is so inefficient and unorganized that its subunits should be assigned to their original executive departments and that the DHS dissolved, or the counterpoint that the DOD - founded in the years after World War II in an effort to foster greater collaboration between defense entities - had the same problems before maturing into its own formidable department. This argument would posit that the DHS should be allowed to develop and gain more power as a separate department. One approach stresses haste and the need for the country to meet the current socio-political realities of the moment, while another urges patience, trusting the natural evolution of government bureaucracies from a haphazard web of subunits into a sophisticated, focused, talented workforce. When examining theory regarding what organizational steps can be taken to prevent disasters and missteps, neither of these extremes seem to be plausible answers.

In 1993, Dr. Scott D. Sagan examined schools of thought regarding the ability for complex organizations to prevent and mitigate accidents and incidents in his work *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents and Nuclear Weapons*. Sagan analyzed these schools of thought in the context of accidental nuclear warfare between professional military organizations but made it clear that these theories can be utilized to examine other catastrophic accidents.⁷⁰ The schools of thought he describes are used in this study to determine whether the continued operation of the DHS in its current state would result in the United States experiencing security failures, the equivalent of Sagan's "accidents."

⁷⁰ Scott D. Sagan, "The Origins of Accidents."

High Reliability Theory

The first school of thought examined by Sagan is labeled the “high reliability organization theory,” which states that, with properly trained risk analysts, scientists, and other necessary professionals, accidents can be prevented through “intelligent organizational design and management.”⁶⁵ The high reliability theory relies on individuals’ abilities to both anticipate potential dangers and build resilience towards dangers that have morphed into reality. This theory is often accused of ignoring the psychological fact that human beings, even when operating dangerous processes and technologies, do make mistakes.

However, proponents of this theory counter that it is not initially built on the constant success and intelligence of individual actors. Rather, the opportunity for individuals to operate in what sociologist Dr. W. Richard Scott labels as a “closed rational system”⁷¹ is necessary for the high reliability theory to become fruitful. Scott, along with professors Dr. Todd La Porte and Dr. Paula Consolini defines closed rational systems as organizations with “highly formalized structures and are oriented toward the achievement of clear and consistent goals,” that “go to great efforts to minimize the effects that actors and the environment outside the organization have on the achievement of such objectives.”⁷² Consolini and La Porte argue that these organizations minimize outside influence through conducting intensive efforts to prepare for almost any “environmental surprises,”⁶⁷ so that individuals without technical competency or understanding of a situation cannot influence an organization’s processes in the event of an emergency due to predetermined procedures. While this assertion sounds very similar to the inflexible routines that have caused trouble for various subunits in the DHS, Sagan provides

⁷¹ W. Richard Scott, *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems*.

⁷² Todd R. La Porte and Paula M. Consolini, “Working in Practice But Not in Theory: Theoretical Challenges of ‘High-Reliability Organizations.’”

additional background on the previous theorists' contentions that explain how their school of thought may generate more successful models for organizations than different schools of thought. Sagan describes four causal factors that have contributed to the success of organizations, in the perspective of high reliability organization theorists: prioritization of safety and reliability by political elites and organizational management, high levels of redundancy by personnel, a decentralized system of operations that emphasize a "high-reliability culture,"⁶⁵ and sophisticated forms of trial-and-error organizational learning. This section will examine these various attributes in the context of high reliability organization theory.

Safety and Reliability Prioritization by Elites and Management

Many organizations' explicit purpose is to protect and secure the safety of civilians and counter emerging threats to a group or country's security. As history has shown, the desire for profits, urge to gain political power, and the need to protect professional and personal reputation have often come into conflict with many organizations' stated promises of safety as their highest priority. These unfortunate circumstances are especially prevalent for organizations created amid chaos, catastrophe, and political tension - the primary descriptors for the setting in which the DHS was established. Notable disasters that have occurred under these conditions include the Chernobyl catastrophe, in which workers were forced to build nuclear reactors cheaply and quickly because they did not have the proper equipment to prevent radiation poisoning.⁷³ Another disaster involving chaotic beginnings was the Bhopal chemical factory disaster in 1984, whose faulty construction was facilitated by the Union Carbide Company, who was eager to tap into the burgeoning chemical market in India as quickly as possible.⁷⁴

⁷³ "Chernobyl Accident 1986."

⁷⁴ Judah Passow and Tim Edwards, "The Long, Dark Shadow of Bhopal: Still Waiting for Justice, Four Decades On."

High reliability organization theorists argue that if the priorities of political elites and organization managers are aligned - especially in terms of money - the insistence on safety being a high priority will move closer to reality rather than an ambitious wish. La Porte and Consolini state that, to prevent accidents, organizations must facilitate significant levels of operational redundancy and “constant operational training,”⁶⁷ both of which require significant budgets if completed continuously. La Porte and Consolini emphasize political scientist and budget theorist Aaron Wildvasky’s assertion that “richer is safer,”⁷⁵ outlining the need for politicians and organizational personnel to coordinate their budgets without intensely inefficient political infighting. While high reliability theorists admit that the game of politics will always be played regarding budgets, there is reasonable mitigation of political tensions between elites and organizational managers to be done in order to improve the safety-orientated processes of an organization. They believe that enough cooperation between political elites and managers is possible to attain extremely high levels of reliability, safety, and security for an organization.

The Importance of Redundancy

Theorists subscribing to the school of high reliability organization theory defend their assertions for rigorous redundancy within organizations by stating that, because individuals do naturally make mistakes over time, redundant safety and operational precautions are needed. These redundant precautions can consist of access to multiple methods of communication for personnel, various circuits to stop technological processes, and abundant security procedures in both cyberspace and on the ground. Proponents of high reliability organization theory agree with mathematician John von Neumann’s assertion that it is possible to build “reliable systems from

⁷⁵ Aaron Wildavsky, *Searching for Safety*.

unreliable parts.”⁷⁶ High reliability theorists state that the presence of duplication - when two entities or units perform the same function - in an organization can be utilized to its advantage, as opposed to the oft-supported claim that duplication hinders an organization’s efficiency and effectiveness. Duplication causes there to be both technical redundancy (multiple high-functioning computers monitoring the same situation and safety technologies of varying complexities) and personnel redundancy (different employees checking safety equipment and operations to ensure success). The combination of personnel and technical redundancy would render organizations and their processes safer, but there are also significant concerns over whether these kinds of redundancies are politically possible. As Sagan states, many politicians actively make a point to rid the government of overlap and increase efficiency to make everyday life affordable for the average taxpayer, rendering the likelihood of these measures being implemented at a scale necessary for the DHS in a productive and concerted manner quite low. While duplication is already present in the DHS, fashioning it to ensure that it does not hinder communication and instead promotes cooperation and partnership will require budgets, time, and immense amounts of skill and effort.

Operational Decentralization

High reliability theorists turn to the organization’s management structure, culture, and training as another method for improving safety and reliability. Theorists state that there must be a decentralization of decision-making amongst organizational hierarchies “in order to permit rapid and appropriate responses to dangers by the individuals closest to the problems at hand.”⁶⁵ Wildavsky is a prominent proponent of organizational decentralization, mentioning numerous

⁷⁶ John Von Neumann, “Probabilistic Logics and the Synthesis of Reliable Organisms from Unreliable Components.”

examples involving successful decentralization for the betterment of the organization. During aircraft carrier operations, analysts have observed high-ranking U.S. Navy officers defer to the expertise of lower ranking personnel on technical judgements, due to the lower ranking personnel's proximity to the technical equipment at the operational focus. Decentralization of a hierarchy necessitates the creation of a "culture of reliability"⁶⁵ within an organization.

Organizations that find themselves confronting unpredictable and dangerous situations must rely on decentralization to ensure that the personnel with the best understanding of the situation at hand are able to immediately begin operating and conducting safety procedures. Many of these personnel are lower-ranking officers or employees, which in turn requires organizations "to recruit, socialize, and train personnel to maintain a strong organizational culture emphasizing safety and reliability."⁶² While this request sounds eerily similar to the institutionalized socialization mandated by professional organizations to enforce particular worldviews for recruits and trainees, the type of socialization advocated for by high reliability theorists focuses on safety above tradition. In many military organizations, socialization is guided by tradition and history rather than what is most beneficial to the current training classes and personnel units. Socialization guided by the mission to improve the safety and reliability of an organization would address the modern needs of the organization, not the needs of the organization that were present when the organization was first created.

Continuous Operations and Training

High reliability theorists conclude their focus on an organization's management structure, culture, and training by advocating for the need for "continuous operations and training."⁶⁵ While this thesis has been consistently critical of government agencies adopting organizational procedures and behaviors from military organizations, the act of continually conducting training

is a military habit that civilian entities can benefit from. A 1991 study conducted by the University of California, Berkeley focused on the management of “hazardous” organizations added weight to this assertion, stating that obstacles to the success of high reliability include “the usual ‘civilian’ combination of stability, routinization, and lack of challenge and variety that predispose an organization to relax vigilance and sink into a dangerous complacency that can lead to carelessness and error.”⁶⁷ Sagan suggests several options proposed by theorists to address the poorly-strategized “civilian combination,” including frequent simulations of complex simulations of emergencies, constant improvements to the training process, and challenge employees to lower their error rates by assigning them challenging but balanced workloads.

These three attributes - “constant training, strong cultural norms, and decentralized decision authority”⁶⁵ are key to establishing what La Porte labels as a “self-regulating work unit where operators are empowered to directly address risks and uncertainties.”⁷⁷ A combination of these characteristics would facilitate the creation of a workforce that would challenge itself to meet present-day challenges while being adaptable in its mission focus, understanding its original purpose while also knowing its flexibility in tackling new and profound threats.

Sagan concludes with a final fourth pillar of what high reliability organization theorists emphasize for hazardous organizations - the capability of personnel to learn and adapt over time. In order to meet new challenges, organizations and their personnel must be given the time and opportunities to learn “through a process of trial and error which activities promote safety and which do not.”⁶⁵ Wildavsky advocates for the need of more opportunities for trial and error within organizations for their processes through arguing that “Without trials there can be no new errors;

⁷⁷ Karlene H. Roberts, Denise M. Rousseau, and Todd R. La Porte, “The Culture of High Reliability: Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment Aboard Nuclear-Powered Aircraft Carriers,.”

but without these errors, there is also less new learning.”⁷⁰ By being able to experience and adjust to circumstances in a world of unknown risks, organizations are able to develop the amount of dexterity and flexibility required to confront dangerous and hazardous situations with high-level consequences. However, high reliability theorists understand that the argument that trial and error - especially in terms of hazardous situations and technologies that can cause widespread death and chaos - will sound callous to politicians focused on short-term victories and advantages over long-term success. Therefore, high reliability theorists are eager to emphasize the importance of simulations, anticipation, and “*imaginations* of trials and errors”⁶⁵ to overcome political sensitivities surrounding the trial-and-error process. Ultimately, High reliability theorists advance the notion that there are four conditions that are necessary to create and maintain what Sagan calls “adequate safety” - political elites and organization managers both prioritizing safety, various levels of redundancy, a combination of decentralization, strong organizational culture, and continuous training, and organizational learning taking place through the trial-and-error process.

Normal Accidents Theory

However, there is another school of thought that argues that no matter what preparations and precautions are made, any organization focused on hazards and that utilizes dangerous technology will experience “serious accidents” that are inevitable over time. Theorists subscribing to this notion are labeled “normal accidents theorists.” One of the most prominent scholars in this field of theory was Yale sociologist Dr. Charles Perrow. In 1977, Perrow wrote an essay critiquing other scholars’ insistence that organizations operated much more rationally and more effectively than they do. He argues that most complex organizations are governed by “sheer chance, accident, and luck; that most decisions are very ambiguous, preference orderings

are incoherent and unstable, efforts at communication and understanding are often ineffective, subsystems are very loosely connected, and most attempts at social control are clumsy and unpredictable.”⁷⁸ Perrow’s assertion directly contradicts high reliability theorists’ optimism that systems and organizations, with the proper precautions, training, and redundancy, can operate soundly and without failure. In his 1984 book, *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies*, Perrow analyzes various hazardous systems and operations such as commercial airline carriers, the petrochemical industry, and international shipping. After analyzing the operations and processes of these organizations and their management, Perrow concluded that “serious accidents are inevitable, no matter how hard we try to avoid them.”⁷⁹

Interactive Complexity

Perrow and other normal accident theorists utilize two rhetorical pillars in their assertions that, despite the enormous efforts of personnel and managers to create failure-proof processes and operations, serious accidents are inevitable. The first of these pillars is termed “interactive complexity.” Perrow defines complex interactions as “those of unfamiliar sequences, unplanned and unexpected sequences, either not visible or not immediately comprehensible.”⁷⁴ These interactions are directly opposed to “linear interactions,” which consists of a “expected and familiar production or maintenance sequence, and those that are quite visible if unplanned.”⁷⁴ An example of a linear interaction would be the processes occurring in a Ford-inspired automobile assembly line, in which a very large operation is broken down into multiple subunits and production occurs in a planned and familiar sequence. If a problem occurs - such as a broken conveyor belt or a workplace injury - operators can see it clearly and deal with it in an

⁷⁸ Charles Perrow, Paul S. Goodman, and Johannes M. Pennings, “Three Types of Effectiveness Studies.”

⁷⁹ Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies*.

appropriate and timely manner. The same cannot be said for nuclear power plants. Instead of consisting of largely independent and simple steps, nuclear plants are operational through several series of coordinated actions and mechanical operations. Sagan notes that, despite years of technological and scientific innovation, nuclear science is still not entirely understood, leading to potential confusion for operators. As opposed to automobile manufacturing operators, who can see and understand their system clearly, nuclear power plant operators are forced to contend with the fact that many safety components are hidden in pipes and containment buildings that are not easily reachable. Sagan utilizes the example of the Three Mile Island accident in 1979 - a warning light that indicated the plant's feedwater valves were not working properly could not be seen by control room operators because the light was covered by a maintenance tag. Perrow argues that organizations anticipate accidents happening in a singular fashion instead of understanding the that operation of organizations with high interactive complexity risks serious accidents, stating "No one dreamed that when X failed, Y would also be out of order and the two failures would interact so as to both start a fire and silence the fire alarm."⁷⁴ According to Perrow, high reliability theorists dismiss how likely it is for multiple components of a highly interactive and complex organization to malfunction and the chaos that stems from that malfunction.

Tight Coupling

The second pillar central to normal accident theorists' argument that serious accidents occur regardless of the preparation and anticipation done is the notion of "tight coupling." High interactive complexity renders it more likely for bizarre accidents to occur, but tight coupling is the condition that allows accidents and their consequences to spiral out of control. "Tightly coupled systems" are characterized by a reliance on time-dependent processes, as planned and unplanned interactions occur rapidly.⁷⁴ This contrasts with "loosely coupled systems," in which

processes can be slowed down for additional risk analyses and products can be shelved temporarily. Tightly coupled systems have processes that must occur in a sequence - there is a singular way to make an item or conduct an operation within that system. Sagan explains that tightly coupled systems feature a lack of what he defines as “slack.” In systems with little slack, “quantities used in production must be precise and the processes must be done right the first time or not at all.”⁶⁵ The culmination of these conditions - time-dependent processes, invariant sequences, and lack of slack - results in operators being forced to rely solely on the safety mechanisms and precautions built into the system. Sagan comments that under these conditions, there is little chance, opportunity, or time to improvise when there are wayward results. Therefore, tightly coupled systems can result in dangerous accidents and consequences, especially in systems dealing with hazardous materials and processes.

Normal Accident Theorists’ Counterarguments

Normal accident theorists utilize the concepts of high interactive complexity and tight coupling, along with other various counterarguments, to address the conditions that high reliability theorists claim can create an accident-free organization. The first of these claims states that, if an alignment of safety priorities between political elites and organizational managers were to occur, the reliability of a system would be greatly increased. Normal accident theorists state that, regardless of the intentions of the organization’s leaders and the political elites, tight coupling and high interactive complexity makes it more likely for serious accidents to happen. Theorists also state that because complex organizations are poorly defined in their missions, especially complex organizations with many personnel. The sheer variety of perspectives and ideas being communicated and transferred within an organization comprising various subunits

make it impossible for leaders to effectively agree that comprehensive safety measures are, and will continue to be throughout the organization's operations, the most crucial priority.

There is also the issue of trust and accountability for lower-level operators. Normal accident theorists argue that, even when political elites and organizational managers are able to effectively communicate their desire to prioritize safety and reliability first and foremost within a system, it is a difficult process to obtain accurate safety information. Politicians and organizational leaders must rely on the reporting of lower-level operators to inform them about the number of accidents occurring in a system and the frequency of such accidents. Operators have reason to lie about these statistics, whether it be the fear of losing their jobs if a system was closed due to safety concerns, to try to not get caught violating safety rules, or fear of retaliation from bosses. Unfortunately, normal accident theorists assert, intention does little to combat the fact that highly interactive and complex systems with tight coupling are going to, inevitably, experience serious accidents.

The normal accidents perspective also counters the claim that additional layers of redundancy in systems will counteract the potential for serious accidents, instead saying that the opposite is true. Additional layers of redundancy create more opportunities for operational failure. Because operations are tightly coupled, when one aspect or part of an operation fails, it is more likely for other aspects or parts of an operation to fail as well. Sagan mentions the example of the near nuclear power plant meltdown in the town of Monroe, Michigan in 1966. When the reactor's coolant attempted to enter the steam generator, a broken safety device obstructed its path, leading to an unstable temperature increase in the plant. Redundant safety measures also render a system "opaquer." When there is human error or a faulty individual component, redundant safety measures compensate for their failure, but make it more difficult for operators

to accurately discern the problem that occurred. With this lack of clarity comes the increased likelihood that these errors are unfixed, resulting in greater potential for more serious accidents over time. Redundant safety measures also embolden operators to riskily experiment with faster and more dangerous production levels, which increases the likelihood of a serious accident occurring.

Perrow directly contradicts the three sub-conditions that high reliability theorists claim make the management of organizations more safe and reliable - decentralization of authority, a strong organizational culture, and continuous training. He explains that, in tightly coupled systems, centralized authority is preferable to decentralized authority. Because tightly coupled systems rely on invariant sequences and time-sensitive processes, there is little room for improvisation and opportunities to adjust provided by decentralized decision-making. Decentralization also makes it difficult for organizational management to properly understand the mechanics and operations that lower-level operators oversee, which causes doubts over whether organizational management has the capacity to distribute contingency instructions to all operators. These doubts devalue the legitimacy of organizational managers' authority in an organization, which can lead to further confusion and mismanagement.

Perrow also argues regarding strong organizational culture that the very condition of being in an individualistic, democratic society makes it impossible for a strong organizational culture to be maintained, explaining "Efforts to extend this model to industry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries failed; it was too incompatible with American social values and culture."⁷⁴ The individualism and desire to express unique ideas decreases the likelihood of an organizational culture unified enough to prevent serious accidents from coming to fruition.

Finally, Perrow addresses the assertion that continuous training and operational experience will aid the avoidance of disasters and accidents. Normal accident theorists argue that systems with high interactive complexity have enough various components and sequences that it is impossible for every single malfunction or emergency to be practiced and prepared for. This issue is complicated further by tight coupling, as the number of possible errors and disruptions increases as more components become reliant on one another. The number of scenarios that cannot be reasonably practiced and prepared for increases, resulting in greater uncertainty and greater chances for serious accidents.

The final claim made by high reliability theorists is that high risk organizations are able to improve upon their safety and reliability through the process of trial and error. Normal accident theorists instead state that the causes of accidents - especially accidents occurring in tightly coupled systems with high interactive complexity - are often difficult to discern. Organizational leaders will tend to “reconstruct history”⁶⁵ based on their best recollection of what transpired, despite lapses in knowledge, to quickly devise a plan to fix the problem. These recollections can be entirely different from what truly occurred during the accident, allowing for “biased interpretations”⁶⁶ to proliferate in trial-and-error campaigns. Personnel then plans and coordinates their emergency preparation and prevention sessions on faulty information, allowing for the original faulty processes and subunits to continue existing.

Normal accident theorists also argue that serious accidents frequently occur in highly politicized environments that require blame to be assigned to someone in an organization. Organizational management have the resources and abilities to give greater protection to themselves, shielding themselves from responsibility and allowing blame to fall to lower-level operators and personnel. Therefore, the individuals responsible for the mistakes in an accident

are allowed to stay in the organization, covering up their mistakes and not creating trial and error simulations that call attention to their fault. The same urge to leave accidents undisclosed for fear of repercussions also exists for lower-level operators and personnel, causing them to not report accidents and failures. This lack of clarity and honesty in reporting allows mistakes to proliferate unchecked in a system, increasing the likelihood of a serious accident. Effective organizational learning is also inhibited by the fact that the activities of some subunits in an organization may be secret or withheld to other subunits, denying the entire organization a chance to learn from a subunit's mistakes. Whether it be to protect its competitive advantage or enhance national security, secrecy between subunits makes it immensely difficult for trial and error to occur in an advantageous manner.

When assessing these two schools of thought, it becomes relatively easy to discern the differences between the optimism of the high reliability theory and the pessimism of the normal accidents theory. The remainder of this section of the thesis will utilize these two theories to build two potential pathways for the continued operation of the Department of Homeland Security.

Applying High Reliability Theory to Potential DHS Reform

If utilizing the high reliability theory, one of the first steps to take would be the decentralization of some of the department's authoritative powers. However, the department is already largely decentralized. The current decentralized structure of the DHS exists because it was meant to mirror the decentralized nature of international "terrorism" organizations. In other words, the effort to build the DHS was an effort in "structuring the agencies so that their

structure matches the threat.”⁸⁰ Agencies are already highly specialized to counter specific threats, whether it be from cyberspace, from the country’s borders, transportation systems, trading outposts, immigration systems, and more. Each state already has its own homeland security office and emergency services system, with some states utilizing those offices for purposes such as securing their borders. Further decentralization of the department would put an even further strain on the relationship between the department’s headquarters and its agencies, weakening communications and intelligence sharing between units while further removing personnel from the original mission.

With decentralization not possible, the next step would be to try to increase redundancy in the DHS. The most apparent way to do this would be to consolidate several offices - and their security measures - together. However, this possible consolidation would potentially create the same problem exhibited by many agencies within the DHS today - they do not feel like they “belong” with the other agencies they are partnered with. Forcing another consolidation of resources and procedures could create even greater confusion and distrust within the department, as personnel are suddenly compelled to learn new security measures and procedures devised by strangers.

In today’s political climate, it is quite difficult to imagine fostering enough goodwill between politicians and agency leaders to effectively strategize a comprehensive safety and security plan on a department-wide scale without considerable political backlash. Besides superficial and superfluous agreements between parties, especially in an effort to stoke public goodwill, bipartisan agreements with department leaders over how to navigate the challenges the

⁸⁰ Charles Perrow, “The Disaster after 9/11: The Department of Homeland Security and the Intelligence Reorganization.”

DHS faces will not result in needed change. This is especially true at the time of this thesis' writing in 2024, as the upcoming national elections promise to make issues such as immigration, border security, and weapons crucial talking points for candidates, many of whom are not eager to compromise on national security issues and work with their colleagues across the aisle.

According to a Gallup poll published on February 27th, 2024, immigration overtook problems such as inflation, poverty, and government effectiveness as the most important problem facing the United States today, with 28% of respondents ranking immigration as their top concern.⁸¹ The most recent instance of Gallup reporting immigration being the most concerning issue to Americans occurred when it reported in July 2019 that 27% of Americans thought that immigration was the most important problem facing the United States. According to the Pew Research Center, in a poll conducted shortly before President Biden's March 2024 State of the Union Address, 57% of Americans state that dealing with immigration should be the president's top policy priority for the election year, an escalation from the 39% of individuals who said the same after Biden's 2023 State of the Union⁸². These polling numbers, coupled with the inflammatory rhetoric espoused by both major political parties, makes it unlikely for bipartisan cooperation on national security issues to occur soon.

In terms of fostering a stronger organizational culture within the DHS, the most practical option would be to downsize the personnel of the DHS to create a more cohesive culture within the department. However, eliminating national security positions during a time of precarious immigration issues, evolving international and domestic threats, an increasingly complicated cyber warfare arena, and escalating tensions with states in possession of weapons of mass

⁸¹ Jeffrey M. Jones, "Immigration Surges to Top of Most Important Problem List."

⁸² Anna Jackson, "Where Americans Stand on the Economy, Immigration and Other Key Issues."

destruction is not logical nor wise. The potential consequences of these cuts became apparent in a statement given by the department in February 2024. After the Senate rejected a measure to fund numerous components of the DHS, such as the CBP, ICE, and the USCIS, the DHS stated that it has begun examining options for downsizing personnel and resources, while also reassigning some personnel to other agencies.⁸³ According to the statement, the USCIS would need to reassign hundreds of personnel from their conventional duties to conduct initial screenings for green cards. Eric Katz, senior correspondent for Government Executive, explained the implications of this move, stating “That would take them away from adjudicating green cards and addressing the asylum backlog, leading to longer wait times for the applicants.”⁷⁶ The rejected deal would have also led ICE to gain 1,200 new employees to combat the increasing number of migrants at the southern U.S. border. ICE is now reportedly considering releasing 38,000 individuals from U.S. custody due to its inadequate amount of personnel. Cutting DHS staff will do little to solve the department’s operational problems and deficiencies.

One of the final potential methods of DHS reform that subscribes to high reliability theory would be the utilization of trial and error to improve operations. However, as stated previously, the current polarized political climate does not provide the proper amount of patience or goodwill to allow for mistakes necessary for trial and error to occur. If the department were to open itself to the possibility of trying several different processes and operating procedures while also acknowledging that those processes and procedures might not be successful, partisan tensions will lead to accusations that the department is wasting government funds and putting civilians in harm's way for the sake of experimentation. Given the fact that the department is still

⁸³ Eric Katz, “DHS to Slash Operations, Reshuffle Workforce without Additional Funds, Agency Warns.”

struggling to secure funding for critical components such as the USCIS and ICE, it is also difficult to see how the department could procure sufficient funding to build and conduct simulations that properly prepare personnel for emergencies.

DHS Dissolution

Given these difficulties, it is improbable that the DHS can benefit from the proposals suggested by high reliability theorists to improve its operational effectiveness, efficiency, and safety. This study now examines the option that would align with the proposals brought by normal accident theorists - the dissolution of the department.

It is important to note that the dissolution of the department itself does not mean the dissolution of the agencies that comprise the department itself. These agencies play critical roles in securing the safety of the country's borders, transportation pathways, public places, cyber space, and more. It is also not appropriate to label this option "reorganization," as that would entail the department itself staying in existence, and its subunits would be reorganized, consolidated, or reassigned within the department. High reliability theorists would propose reorganization of the DHS, while normal accident theorists would suggest abolishment of the department.

A critical component of the dissolution of the department would be the elimination of the department's central headquarters and reassignment of its subunits to numerous components of the federal government. To satisfy its military tradition and operational nature, it would be most sensible for the U.S. Coast Guard to be reassigned to the Department of Defense. In order to best align it with its duties as a financial crime investigation unit and putting its officials under a department with a much longer history of oversight and administration, it would be best for the U.S. Secret Service to be reassigned back to the Department of Treasury, its original department

for 138 years. U.S. Customs and Border Protection should be adjusted to focus solely on border security, allowing the Department of Commerce to take authority over customs enforcement. The various components of the department's Science and Technology Directorate, the department's research and development arm, should be reassigned to the departments that are most applicable to their subject matter. For example, the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center, which is responsible for investigating biological hazards to the U.S., can be reassigned to the Department of Defense. FEMA should be able to obtain an independent, cabinet-level agency so that it is not inhibited by the needs of more than 20 other agencies. The ability for FEMA to operate and adjust quickly has become even more important since its realignment with the DHS, as climate-related disasters have required the agency to provide millions of people in every corner of the country supplies and resources to survive at greater frequencies. The Transportation Security Administration would be reassigned to the Department of Transportation but would also receive guidance from the FBI's National Security Branch to ensure that its personnel are able to protect the nation's airways utilizing more stringently investigated evidence-based methods.

The core of the DHS - the components that primarily focus on combating international and domestic terrorist threats against the United States - should form a new department dedicated to counterterrorism, espionage, cybercrimes, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. According to national security expert Richard A. Clarke, this new department - what he calls the "Department of Public Safety"⁸⁴, would work closely with the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Security Branch, whose primary focuses include weapons of mass destruction, "terrorism", and espionage threats. Having a smaller, more cohesive department

⁸⁴ Richard A. Clarke, "Replacing the Department of Homeland Security With Something Better."

allows for experts to focus on national security threats without being tied to numerous other bureaucratic tasks and needs that come with being part of a bureaucratic behemoth. As Clark puts it, “Giving these agencies a new start in manageably sized bureaucracies with focused missions, unburdened from past errors and reputation-damaging missteps, would create a more rational organizational structure with better chances of succeeding at their important tasks.”⁷⁷ While the dissolution of the DHS will take copious amounts of effort, time, and energy, the payoffs - a stronger national security apparatus for the entire country, a more focused and cohesive workforce dedicated to stopping threats well before they come to fruition, and the placement of other critical components of the nation’s government into far more suitable and appropriate departments - are too advantageous to ignore.

It is entirely understandable why the Department of Homeland Security came to be. Amid the deadliest terror attack ever committed and the catastrophic losses of thousands of lives, politicians, government officials, civil servants, the private sector, and many more individuals wanted to be part of the effort to make sure such tragedy does not happen again. The sheer scale of the devastation needed to be met by a reaction of change and reform at an equal scale. As the 9/11 Commission reports, “We believe the 9/11 attacks revealed four kinds of failures: in imagination, policy, capabilities, and management.”⁸⁵ The construction of the DHS was meant to directly combat those failures. In many aspects, the DHS has risen to the occasion. For example, the DHS established the Cybersecurity and Information Security Agency in 2018, enabling the government to become more adept at countering escalating threats of cyberwarfare. Additionally, the CBP has greatly expanded its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking into the U.S. and the manufacturing of fentanyl. The CBP reported that, under its “Operation Artemis,” it was able to

⁸⁵ United States Department of Homeland Security, “Congress Passes Legislation Standing up Cybersecurity Agency in DHS.”

seize 13,000 pounds of precursor chemicals at the U.S. southern border, which would have been utilized to manufacture fentanyl⁸⁶. During Operation Rolling Wave, the CBP was able to seize 3,635 pounds of fentanyl and over 10,000 pounds of methamphetamine.⁸⁰ FEMA, in coordination with flood insurance providers, state and local governments, tribes, and universities, created a comprehensive flood hazard mapping program to alert vulnerable populations about where and when dangerous and destructive flooding occurs.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ United States Customs and Border Protection, “CBP: America’s Front Line Against Fentanyl,” U.S. Customs and Border Protection.”

⁸⁷ Federal Emergency Management Agency, “Flood Maps.”

For all the good that it has done for the country, the legacy of the DHS should not be known as one of dysfunction or chaos. It is now best to abolish the department and allow its courageous and dedicated personnel to perform their critical duties in a more effective and efficient manner.

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