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Abstract

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created in the aftermath of 9/11 terror attacks which was highly an extraordinary period. The Bush Administration already had a policy agenda intended to make radical changes in the federal management structure. However, it lacked public and political support. 9/11 provided the administration with the window of opportunity. Oppositions from the Congress and unions were manipulated with national security rhetoric. Then, the creation of the DHS was decided by a small group of people in the administration. Experts and affected agencies were not included in the process which yielded to redundancies in organizational structure. Therefore, The DHS structure should be revised and reorganized to avoid these redundancies in responsibilities and budget, and network structures should be addressed more for better coordination and collaboration.

Keywords: Department of Homeland Security, Punctuated Equilibrium, Large Leaps, Redundancy, Networks, Political Discourse.

Introduction

The DHS has been the target of harsh criticisms since its creation in 2002 for its deficiencies in management and budget. This study examines the foundation of the DHS within the context of Punctuated Equilibrium Theory. This theory posits that when there are proper conditions, there can be significant policy and institutional changes and shifts. Within this context, the study also questions the rhetoric of the administration during the policy-making process of the DHS and introduces some frameworks in which these policy-making processes fit in. Finally, it discusses thecumbersome and redundant structure of the organization; and provides implications at the end of the study.

Policy Problem

The foundation of the DHS has been among the most significant policy changes since the creation of the Department of Defense in the 1940’s, and it constitutes 22 federal organizations with over 170,000 employees (Moynihan, 2005; Brook & King, 2007). The Secretary of the DHS was empowered by extraordinary managerial power, and the
relevant parties did not sufficiently discuss creation policy such as the Congress, unions, public, and agencies. Now it is time to reconsider the structure of the DHS for more effective collaboration, cooperation, and funding.

**Significance of the Policy Problem**

The DHS, as a super agency with over 200,000 employees and budget of billions of dollars, has vital importance for the American public administration structure. The department has been rapidly growing since its creation in 2002. It has responsibilities in both pre-disaster and post-disaster duties which require collaboration among federal, state and local governments as well as various non-governmental entities. Although the DHS was empowered with a coordination role, it turned out to be patronizing upper management which affected coordination and collaboration among state and local governments as well as NGO’s participating in disaster recovery efforts.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study examines the establishment of the DHS within the context of Punctuated Equilibrium Theory also known as Large Leaps Theory of Change. This theory envisions that when there are proper conditions, there can be significant policy and institutional changes and shifts.

The theory suggests that governmental entities try to maintain the status quo and have control over the way the issues are defined, and decisions are made. Furthermore, people cannot pay attention to all the problems in the current political arena; and significant shifts and changes cannot occur without focusing on a specific issue. It also assumes that the media have a profound impact on directing interests and attention or shifting the focus from one problem to another. However, the media cannot change the policy by itself, but it helps the change. Finally, as this study explains the foundation of the DHS, large-scale policy changes usually include creation or abolition of institutions (Stachowiak, 2013). In this context, Stachowiak (2013) envisions four conditions for a fundamental change to happen that are a redefinition of the problem, increased media/public attention, the involvement of the new actors and re-examination of the issue from different perspectives.

The conceptual map given below illustrates how the punctuated equilibrium theory works. It indicates that redefining an issue is followed by mobilizing new actors (public, legislators, and new allies); and on the other hand, it requires media attention for a redefinition. This results in increased media and public support for the change. Now, the issue is more visible to the public and awareness has been raised. Then, an increase in political will for change and perception of the urgency of the problem occurs. This increased awareness and focus will eventually result in significant changes in institutional policies such as creation or abolition.
The foundation of the DHS can be explained through this theoretical framework. The Bush administration had already been working on the foundation of such a mega-department before the 9/11 attacks (Moynihan, 2005). However, the creation of the DHS came after the attacks. The administration changed its discourse from “administrative reform” to “national security” that provided the required support from the public, media and Capitol Hill.

**Literature Review**

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created as a Cabinet-level agency by Homeland Security Act in 2002 right after 9/11 terrorist attacks. It was built by combining 22 already existing organizations in the U.S. with total 170,000 federal personnel (Brook & King, 2007).

The foundation of the DHS can be partially explained through the conceptualization of “iron triangle” by Smith and Larimer (2013). This triangle consists of Congress, bureaucracy, and interest groups. In the DHS case, Congress, bureaucracy, and union oppositions were suppressed through media coverage and national security rhetoric. Thus, creation policy was built behind the closed doors by a small group of people in the administration without sufficient discussion with the affected parties including the public. Accordingly, Brook and King (2007) argue that “the HSA proposal was drafted by a small group of staff in the White House” (p.404). The related agencies and professionals...
were not asked about their opinions and expertise. It helped the expedition of the enactment, but significant personnel management issues were overlooked. Furthermore, the policy decision was not based on empirical data or technical knowledge. Therefore, it is arguable to advocate that this decision provided technocrats with the central power as Smith and Larimer (2013) posit.

On the other hand, the creation of the DHS can also be explained with Lindblom’s (1990) dichotomy of society’s conceptualization. He dichotomizes societies in problem context as self-guiding and scientifically guided societies. Scientifically guided society conceptualization argue that policy creation and problem-solving requires technical knowledge and skills which ordinary citizens do not have. On the other hand, self-guided societies conceptualization argues that there is an incremental and experiential development in societies. In this case, a small group of people in the administration enforced the creation of this mega-agency without proper discussions and examinations of the experts, affected agencies, and the public.

Before the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration already had a policy program called the President’s Management Agenda which envisioned government-wide legislations to boost managerial flexibility in the budget, personnel management and property disposal (Moynihan, 2005). However, it lacked public and political support. In Smith and Larimer’s (2013) conceptualization, the 9/11 served a policy windows of opportunity for the administration to realize its managerial agenda. As Moynihan (2005) argues, “management agenda … was successfully tied to the issue of security during a political window of opportunity” (p.171).The conditions for a policy leap were already met. The public and the media were ready to support the “war on terror.” The only issue was to persuade the Congress and unions, and the administration ensured that through the “national security” rhetoric.

In this sense, Moynihan (2005) defends that the Homeland Security Act (HSA) was a victory for the president’s management agenda which had existed even before the 9/11. It provided the administration with the required political power and support for policy change. Accordingly, Smith and Larimer (2013) argue that the political power has a profound impact on the policy decisions and the outcomes, which yielded to the foundation of the DHS in this case.

Another framework that may partially explain the foundation of the DHS is introduced by Lindblom (1990). He conceptualizes three situations within societies: multiplism, pluralism, and mutual adjustment. Multiplism is defined as the situation in which millions of people have millions of volitions concerning public policies. Those people come together and create interest groups to make their preferences grouped and heard by policymakers. This situation is called pluralism. But still, there are thousands of groupstrying to realize their desires, some of which inevitably conflict with each other. Policy makers still cannot respond to all preferences. At this point, manipulation
of group volitions is of vital importance. In most cases, media coverage manipulates the perceptions of people as to what they need. That is exactly what happened in the DHS case. The Bush administration smoothly manipulated the management arguments towards national security concerns. Thus, opponents could not hold their position for a lengthy period.

Then, the created interest groups revise and adjust their volitions according to the other groups’ discourses and manipulations. This situation is referred to as a mutual adjustment. This process may be called as “volition reduction” as well. Mutual adjustment is made through two distinct ways. The first one is central decision making in which a person or an agency decides which volitions to realize. In the second one, groups negotiate their interests. In the DHS case, national security rhetoric manipulated oppositions from the unions concerning the soft decision-making power of the Secretary of the DHS in the proposal. Thus, the administration broke the resistance.

However, there were fierce arguments on the Department of Homeland Security Act (HSA) within the Congress and Senate. The secretary of the DHS had extraordinary power in personnel management, budgeting, and collective bargaining. Unions were also involved in the arguments to protect their bargaining rights. The law provided the president with the power of abrogation of union agreements for national security reasons. The administration managed to convert the discussion from “management flexibility vs. union rights” to “national security vs. union rights” (Brook & King, 2007). This discourse helped the administration gain public and political support to finalize their agenda. The change in the rhetoric of the policy agenda resulted in increased public, media and political support. In the DHS case, this created “disequilibrium” in the public management system. Thus, the policy issue was tied to the public interests which enabled the Bush administration to make drastic changes (Moynihan, 2005).

Accordingly, Smith and Larimer (2013) mention about biases and the role of values in policymaking. The values of policymakers deeply affect the decision making process and results. Again, Jaccard and Jacoby (2010) argue that the way of the communication of perceptions has a profound impact on people’s view of reality. In this case, the Bush administration, already having a management agenda, benefitted the extraordinary status quo and the change in rhetoric and values to their best advantage.

On the other hand, Brook and King (2007) define the DHS as “the largest and most complex reorganization of the federal government since the Department of Defense was created…” (p.399). This complexity also generated managerial conflicts in leadership. Who is going to be in charge during a catastrophe? The response to the Hurricane Katrina caused criticisms regarding the structure of the DHS. Opponents of the current structure argue that a formerly federal level institution, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was placed under the cumbersome hierarchy of the DHS. Thus, non-terrorism related emergency and disaster management missions were
downgraded as a secondary concern (Weise, 2006). As a solution, Weise (2006) proposes that the role of the Department of Defense should be addressed more and FEMA should be relieved from the hierarchy of the DHS. The FEMA director should directly report to the president as before. Furthermore, in times of emergency, the FEMA director should have been able to use presidential discretionary power to decrease red tape and lethargic bureaucracy. The DHS takes responsibility for pre-and post-disaster stages which creates additional bureaucratic layers.

Furthermore, Wise (2006) argues that the federal government does not have a leadership role during disaster response and recovery operations. The primary function of the federal government is to provide resources in case of inadequacies in local and state levels. The National Incident Command System also envisions that most incidents will be managed locally. In this case, FEMA is responsible for coordination of disaster networks which consist of thousands of governmental and nongovernmental organizations. Therefore, the network structures should be addressed more. To this end, O’Toole (1997) states that networks are the structures that involve several organizations (whether governmental or not) and none of these agencies are under the hierarchy of the other. Putting FEMA under the hierarchical structure of the DHS paradoxically increases the bureaucracy although one of the main reasons behind the creation of the DHS was to expedite the response and recovery actions.

Besides, Kettl (2003) states that in homeland security context, the main issue with coordination is the paradox between American local government history with discretionary power and the difficulty of creating and enforcing the standards for each of these local governments. Besides, the nature of the disasters requires complex relationships within the DHS and out of the DHS. There are intricate networks in disaster settings, and this intricacy hardens the answer to the question “who is in charge”? In this sense, Perrow (2006) argues that the DHS should have central coordination power, not central control; because the nature of the threats to the homeland security requires empowered decentralized units.

Accordingly, Lindblom (1990) argues that centralism is an integral component of coordination. Public and the government officials may not holistically see the picture because of the high-level complexity and intricacy of social problems and policy making. Most of the times, social affairs are wicked ones which require the collaboration of multiple parties. Therefore, stakeholders and participants of policy-making typically are not aware of what they are doing in a broad sense. At this point, the importance of central decision making arises. On the other hand, there is a paradox between decentralization/diffusion of power and central decision making. The nature of disasters and emergencies, in which seconds count, requires more local discretionary power for an immediate response. On the other hand, people within the crises may not grasp the whole picture of the situation and the needs.
On the other hand, Waugh (2003) mentions about the cultural differences of organizations in disaster networks. He argues that government organizations such as law enforcement agencies and military tend to act in more top-down decision-making structure whereas nonprofit organizations tend to work in a more decentralized way. It causes a “clash” of authorities during disasters. For instance, during the Hurricane Katrina, local, state and federal governments blamed each other regarding inefficiencies in their operations. Waugh (2003) believes that federal and state officials compete for authority over supplies and resources.

Discussion

In the light of the theoretical framework and the literature, the foundation of the DHS can be discussed in the context of a large leap change. Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, as stated earlier, envisions that when there are proper conditions, there can be significant policy and institutional reforms and shifts. The theory also assumes that the media have a significant impact on directing interests and attention or shifting the focus from one issue to another. The subtle point here is that the media cannot change the policy by itself. It facilitates the change. Finally, large-scale policy changes usually include creation or abolition of institutions (Stachowiak, 2013).

In the DHS case, the policy decision-making procedures can be explained through this framework. 9/11 attacks helped the government receive media support by changing the rhetoric from management reform to the national security which at the time was the most significant priority of the American public opinion. The rage towards the terrorists in general unified the public opinion in favor of the administration. Through the high media coverage, the government broke the resistance of the Congress and the unions. In other words, the 9/11 attacks brought about the required “disequilibrium” for the administration. The need for structural change was more significant for the public than before. The revised rhetoric of the government increased the attention and finally, as the theory envisions, the process ended with the creation of a superagency: The Department of Homeland Security.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the lead federal agency responsible for preventing acts of terrorism and protecting against all threats to the security of the United States. It has a significant role in national security, public safety, and emergency preparedness.

Figure 2: The Department of Homeland Security Organization Chart
Source: The DHS Web Site

Figure 2 represents the formal structure of the DHS. It illustrates the hierarchy within the department. Although agencies such as FEMA, Coast Guard, and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) have a significant place in the federal structure, they were positioned under the DHS, which created additional layers of bureaucracy. The FEMA director had been directly reporting to the President before it was placed under the DHS. It was known for its success and effectiveness. On the other hand, after the creation of the DHS, its missions in disaster management were downgraded and subordinated to the terrorism-related missions of the DHS. However, the FEMA director should be able to use presidential power during disasters and should not have to deal with the layers of the bureaucracy, due to the time-sensitive nature of disasters.

Figure 3 provided below illustrates the redundancies and mission overlaps (Kettl, 2003) within the DHS. It requires a re-organization of the DHS to avoid government-wide unnecessary spending.
Besides, Figure 4 represents the budget increase of the DHS through the financial years from 1995 to 2009. The budget quadrupled between 2001 and 2009. This expansion requires audits considering the redundancies. The department has been growing fast and patronizing over state and local governments through Homeland Security Block Grants because the resource allocation is one of the most significant powers of the DHS.
The Review of the U.S Department of Homeland Security’s Structure in the Context of Punctuated Equilibrium

Figure 4: Homeland Security Spending Through Years (Rugy, 2008)

Implications and Conclusion

The American society has overcome the extraordinary period of post-9/11 era. Therefore, it may be the time for “devolutionary” changes for the DHS. To this end, the structure of the DHS should be revised for managerial and financial efficiencies. The redundancies should also be eliminated due to the affectson disaster response. In this sense, network structures should be addressed better for more effective collaboration and cooperation.
Bibliography


