

**Statement of
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United States House of Representatives**

**Concerning
The Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC)**

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Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member King, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my perspectives on Federal Advisory Committees, and specifically the Homeland Security Advisory Committee (HSAC).

In the fall of 2006, I resigned my position as Assistant Secretary of Strategic Plans within the Department of Homeland Security's Policy Directorate. I served previously as Acting Under Secretary of Border and Transportation Security, a position I assumed in March 2005. I first joined the Department in December 2002 as a member of the transition team that established the Department of Homeland Security, and served in each of my positions at DHS as a career civil servant. Though I am currently the Vice President of Human Capital and Corporate Communications for Analytic Services, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation that provides analytic support to the government in both national security and homeland security, my testimony today is as a private citizen.

In my various capacities within the Department of Homeland Security and in my current capacity, I have enjoyed the opportunity to meet and brief the Homeland Security Advisory Council on a number of topics. I have read and consumed selected reports, and have spoken with several of the members on a variety of topics. During my tenure at DHS, however, I had no responsibility for the performance of the HSAC or for the HSAC's interaction with its primary beneficiary – the Secretary. I was and remain, in effect, a consumer of their products and an observer of their interaction with the Department and with the public. In addition to my interaction with the HSAC, I also co-chaired the Advisory Committee to the Office of State & Local Training in support of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, a DHS Federal Advisory Committee (FAC) external to the HSAC.

You have asked me to address several issues at today's hearing: the efficiency and effectiveness of the HSAC in addressing pressing issues of Homeland Security, the extent to which the Department makes use of HSAC reports, and the degree to which the Department capitalizes on the talents of the HSAC's individual members.

The most valuable contributions by any Federal Advisory Committee, and the HSAC in particular, come by way of the depth of knowledge and broad perspective of individual members. The effectiveness of FACs depends largely on their ability to master a tricky balancing act between transparency and candor. The public has a right to understand the mechanics and nature of the Committee itself, including the composition of its membership, its operation, and its recommendations. Senior officials in the Executive branch, without eschewing transparency, need candid advice from experts unfettered by the constraints of press coverage and public exposure.

In general, and not in reference to any committee in particular, Federal Advisory Committees are most successful when committee members and the sponsoring official recognize these dynamics. Effectiveness, to a large degree, depends on the willingness of Committee members to gracefully accept their moments in the national spotlight--informing the public while not gratuitously antagonizing the sponsor, and maintaining honesty and frankness in private discussions among themselves and with senior officials. Committee members must ensure their reports are of the highest quality and reflect the best thinking available in their area of responsibility. The sponsor, conversely, must recognize that the advisory committee is not a rubber stamp for administration policy, but is, indeed, a group of experts who are dedicating themselves to helping the government understand and solve some of the nation's most pressing issues. Public meetings and reports are part of this arrangement and can be useful tools in shaping the public discourse. It is also critical that the sponsor give sufficient time to the advisory committee. Nothing is more frustrating to committee members than to work diligently on a problem without the opportunity to present findings, engage in a discussion with the sponsor, and be taken seriously as a valued contributor.

During the period I was most engaged with the HSAC, I was impressed by both the quality of its membership--their enthusiasm and sense of purpose in helping the Department with the tough issues—and the Department's efforts to inform and educate the committee on DHS activities. I was also aware of the types of tensions not uncommon to Federal Advisory Committees, including the tension between senior officials' lack of enthusiasm about engaging the Committee publicly and the Committee's resultant lack of meaningful access to decision makers. Another source of tension was the Department's focus on short term, tactical, and political issues as opposed to the HSAC's longer term strategic approach to issues.

I was particularly interested in three of the HSAC's products in recent years – its reports on Critical Infrastructure, the Future of Terrorism, and DHS Culture. I will comment upon two of these reports; the Task Force on Critical Infrastructure Report, of which I was a consumer, and the Task Force on the Future of Terrorism Report, of which I was both a consumer and contributor. While keenly interested in the Culture Report, I had little interaction with the Task Force and the Task Force's report was issued several months after I departed the Department.

The Critical Infrastructure Task Force Report illustrated the long term focus of the HSAC. The task force gave considerable, intellectually sound thought to this important national issue. The portion of the report I personally found most interesting was that of resilience, a topic I had discussed with the task force several times. I had been impressed with the notion and language of

resilience coming out of the United Kingdom, and the important point on that side of the Atlantic about the necessity of bouncing back or recovering after an attack. This notion of resiliency was not simply about restoring services, but about attitude and confidence in the overall system. In my discussions with the HSAC task force it became clear to me that the task force and I were independently reaching similar conclusions about critical infrastructure, and if critical infrastructure protection was Homeland Security 101, Resiliency would be Homeland Security 301. We had to begin to shift our focus to restoring systems rather than protecting individual pieces of critical infrastructure. This was particularly evident in the aftermath of Katrina, and as I reflected back to the 2005 TOPOFF 3 exercise, I realized that we were clearly beginning to think about resiliency then, though not as an overarching goal or systematic way of thinking about critical infrastructure. Following my discussions with the task force, I made an effort to institutionalize the notion of resiliency, and built the concept into the Department's draft 2006 Strategic Plan.

The second HSAC project in which I had a particular interest was the report of the Task Force on the Future of Terrorism, a report in which I was cited as a subject matter expert. I was very much interested in seeing that the report reflected the emerging views of a group of experts I had assembled on the subject--views concerning the importance of American ideals as a key element in the integration of at-risk communities in preventing violent homegrown extremism.

A year or so before the HSAC Task Force was established I convened a meeting of the various offices and components within the Department working on any aspect of "radicalization," a concept whose definition was, at the time, vague and ambiguous and an issue on which interagency efforts were poorly coordinated. The first thing we realized was that each office or component had different notions of what radicalization meant, and that few offices knew about or understood the work of the others. In fact, the Department was engaged in a number of activities under the broad rubric of understanding and countering "radicalization." The Intelligence and Analysis Directorate, for example, was engaged in intelligence community activities related to radicalization and was conducting a systematic survey of radicalization dynamics within several key states. The Science and Technology Directorate had two significant initiatives that offered resources to study the issue: the Center of Excellence for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland, and an academic partnership program that could draw upon prominent experts within the social sciences. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigrations Service was coordinating the "Task Force for New Americans," an interagency effort to help legal immigrants embrace the common core of American civic culture. The Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties was providing leadership within government on opening avenues of communication with key communities, on managing crisis communication, and on highlighting the government's commitment to investigating and prosecuting hate crimes and discrimination. The Policy Directorate was, of course, engaged in long term strategies and was the primary interface with the larger government community on planning. Out of this first meeting emerged the Department's Radicalization Working Group (RWG).

The RWG would eventually grow to include members from across the Department, including staff members of the HSAC, and would provide subject matter analysis for the report of the Task Force on the Future of Terrorism. The RWG hosted a number of forum events (including one

that examined the dynamics and structural contrasts of radicalization in the U.S. and Europe) and eventually identified a number of strategic advantages inherent to the American civil and social fabric—namely, our low barriers to economic participation, the religiously accepting and ethnically plural character of our society, and the nature of the civil democratic spirit that permeates our culture. The RWG established relationships with partners at the Department of Justice, the Bureau of Prisons and its Correctional Intelligence Initiative, the Department of State, and foreign counterpart agencies in the United Kingdom, Canada, France, the Netherlands, and other nations interested in the issue and dynamics of radicalization. The HSAC Task Force was able to capitalize on these relationships in the creation of its report, and was able to draw upon members of the group as subject matter experts to testify on the Department's emerging approach in understanding the dynamics of the issue, enhancing the capabilities of state and locals, and engaging with key communities to prevent estrangement and cultural isolation.

While the focus of the report of the task force was far broader than radicalization, it included a number of findings from the Department's Radicalization Working Group. The report served to educate various state, local, and private sector leaders on the dynamics of the issue, and highlighted its importance to senior leadership at the Department. The report also foreshadowed the recent National Intelligence Estimate on the Terrorist Threat to the U.S. Homeland, released last week.

As an aside, it is important to remember that understanding terrorism, at least in the U.S., is an evolving discipline. In the two years that I have been engaged in this issue I have seen tremendous progress in understanding the phenomenon of radicalization. The task force's report was an appropriate snapshot at the point it was written.

Certainly the issues the HSAC has addressed have been important strategic issues. While the quality and impact of the reports vary, all of the reports have salient points and have helped shape the discussion within the Department and in the public. While the primary consumer of the Committee's work is the Secretary, the real audience is the senior leadership and policy shapers within the Department, and in that respect I give the HSAC passing marks in both efficiency and effectiveness. My sense is that while the reports are useful, the real impact of the Committee lies in the personal interchanges with senior staff during the course of research and shaping ideas and recommendations. I personally found these discussions to be most useful. I cannot speak for the Secretary, but I presume that his ongoing interactions and discussions with the HSAC and members of the HSAC were as beneficial, if not more so, than the actual reports.

In summary, Federal Advisory Committees and their sponsors must balance the need for open and transparent processes and discussions with the value of frank and candid exchanges of ideas. In my personal experience with the HSAC I have seen a maturing that indicates this balance is acceptable. Finally, the value of the HSAC resides not just in the reports it issues, but also in the exchange of ideas as it researches and prepares the report.

Thank you Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member King, and Members for this opportunity to speak on this important issue.