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Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations,
and Emergency Management, Committee on
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Representatives

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COMBATING TERRORISM

**Comments on Bill
H.R. 4210 to Manage
Selected Counterterrorist
Programs**

Statement for the Record of Norman J. Rabkin, Director
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National Security and International Affairs Division



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Madam Chairman:

We are pleased to submit this statement for the record to comment on a bill introduced before this subcommittee at your April 6, 2000 hearing—the Terrorism Preparedness Act of 2000 (H.R. 4210). The bill creates a new Office of Terrorism Preparedness to coordinate and make more effective federal efforts to assist state and local emergency and response personnel in preparation for domestic terrorist attacks.

Summary

Overall, we believe that H.R. 4210 would address some of the problems of fragmentation and duplication that we and others have found in programs to combat terrorism. Specifically, the bill would create a new Office of Terrorism Preparedness to centralize leadership and coordination of federal programs to help state and local governments prepare for terrorist incidents involving weapons of mass destruction. However, the duties of the new office, as currently described in the bill, may overlap with some functions of the recently created National Domestic Preparedness Office. Our work on the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), on which the Office of Terrorism Preparedness is patterned, suggests that success in achieving the bill's goals depends on the Office head's ability to build consensus among the involved agencies. In addition, the new office may take some time to accomplish its objectives as laid out in the bill. The limited scope of the new statutory office would not address some of the larger problems with fragmented leadership and coordination in federal programs to combat terrorism.

H.R. 4210 Would Address Some Fragmentation Issues

H.R. 4210 would address some of the fragmentation problems that we and others have found in providing assistance to state and local governments to prepare for terrorist incidents involving weapons of mass destruction. Our past work has concluded that the multiplicity of federal assistance programs requires focus and attention to minimize redundancy of efforts and eliminate confusion at the state and local level. The Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction—also known as the Gilmore Panel—recently testified about similar problems before your subcommittee.

To eliminate these types of problems, the bill would create a new Office of Terrorism Preparedness within the Executive Office of the President. The new Office would have, among others, the following specific duties.

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- Establish, coordinate and oversee policies, objectives and priorities of the Federal government for enhancing the capabilities of state and local emergency preparedness and response personnel.
 - Publish a Domestic Terrorism Preparedness Plan and an annual strategy for carrying out the plan.
 - Review terrorist attack preparedness programs of state and local governments, and establish voluntary minimum standards for such programs.

As currently proposed in the bill, the Office may overlap with some functions to be performed by the existing National Domestic Preparedness Office. The Attorney General established this office within the Department of Justice to be responsible for interagency leadership and coordination of federal efforts to provide assistance for state and local governments to prepare for terrorist incidents involving weapons of mass destruction. As an example of potential duplication, the National Domestic Preparedness Office recently issued a “blueprint” for federal assistance, which is analogous to the new Office of Terrorism Preparedness function to prepare a national plan and strategy.

In addition, the bill would limit the scope of the new Office of Terrorism Preparedness to incidents involving weapons of mass destruction. According to intelligence and law enforcement officials, terrorists are least likely to use these types of weapons. The Subcommittee may want to consider authorizing the Office of Terrorism Preparedness to assist state and local governments to prepare for both weapons of mass destruction and the more likely threat of conventional explosives.

Lessons to Be Learned From ONDCP

The proposed Office of Terrorism Preparedness is patterned after ONDCP. The ONDCP was created by Congress in 1988 to better plan the national drug control effort and assist Congress in overseeing the effort. ONDCP is the President’s primary policy office for drug issues and has three Major responsibilities.

- Develop a national drug control strategy with short and long term objectives and annually revise and issue a new strategy.
- Develop an annual consolidated drug control budget providing funding estimates for implementing the strategy.
- Oversee and coordinate implementation of the strategy by the various federal agencies.

We believe that many of the experiences of ONDCP may be useful for the Subcommittee in refining this bill and, if enacted, overseeing the operations of the Office of Terrorism Preparedness. We have issued several reports on ONDCP's efforts to develop and implement a national strategy and to assess the adequacy of federal budgets and programs to carry out that strategy. There are several important lessons to be learned.

- Fragmentation had hampered federal efforts to control drugs, therefore strong central leadership was needed to overcome longstanding problems with agencies not sharing information and not coordinating programs.
- As established in the Executive Office of the President, ONDCP was positioned to rise above the particular interests of any one federal agency.
- Getting consensus among federal agencies with diverse missions, for whom drug control was a minor role, was difficult and time-consuming.
- After its creation, it took ONDCP almost ten years (from 1988 to 1997) to develop the current national strategy.
- Although called for in its 1988 legislation, ONDCP did not develop performance indicators until 1998.
- Despite these problems, we supported the reauthorization of the ONDCP due to the continuing need for a central agency to provide leadership, planning, and coordination for the nation's drug control efforts.

Although there are some similarities, the ONDCP's broad scope of activities sets it apart from the proposed Office of Terrorism Preparedness. ONDCP is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the drug control efforts for over 50 agencies and programs, with an annual budget of almost \$20 billion. The ONDCP is involved in the entire range of drug control efforts—both supply reduction (interdiction, international, and law enforcement efforts) and demand reduction (education and treatment efforts). There is no equivalent of the ONDCP for the broader management of counterterrorism programs.

H.R. 4210 Would Not Address Larger Fragmentation of Federal Counterterrorism Programs

H.R. 4210 would not resolve some of the overall fragmentation problems in federal programs to combat terrorism. In May 1998, the President appointed a National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection and Counterterrorism within the National Security Council, who is tasked to oversee a broad variety of relevant policies and programs related to counterterrorism, produce an annual Security Preparedness Report, provide advice regarding budgets for counterterrorism programs and coordinate guidelines for managing crises. Despite the creation of this position, overall federal efforts remain fragmented because key interagency management functions are conducted by different departments and agencies. We believe that this is one cause for the following problems in federal efforts to combat terrorism that we have reported.

- There is a lack of linkage between the terrorist threat, a national strategy, and agency resources.
- Federal efforts to combat terrorism have been based on worst case scenarios which are out of balance with the threat.
- Without coordination, agencies could develop their own programs in isolation, creating the potential for gaps and/or duplication.
- Federal agencies have not completed interagency guidance and resolved some command and control issues.
- Efforts to develop a national strategy continue, but to date they have not included a clear desired outcome to be achieved.
- Efforts to track federal spending across agencies have started, but they have only begun efforts to prioritize programs.

Because the proposed Office of Terrorism Preparedness is limited to the function of providing assistance to state and local governments, it will not address these larger issues of fragmentation in interagency leadership and management. As stated earlier, there is no equivalent of the ONDCP for the broader management of counterterrorism programs. As shown in Table 1, ONDCP centralizes key interagency management functions for drug control that are not centralized for combating terrorism.

Table 1. Organizations Currently Responsible for Key Interagency Management Functions for Counterdrug and Counterterrorism Programs

Function	Counterdrug	Counterterrorism
Act As Top Official Accountable To President	ONDCP	National Security Council (National Coordinator For Security, Infrastructure Protection And Counterterrorism)
Act as Top Official Accountable to Congress	ONDCP	Numerous officials (including the Attorney General, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense)
Develop a National Interagency Strategy	ONDCP	Attorney General
Set Priorities within National Strategy	ONDCP	Office of Management and Budget in theory, but actually done by individual agencies
Develop and Monitor International Programs	ONDCP	Secretary of State (via Coordinator for Counterterrorism)
Provide Liaison and Assistance to State and Local Governments	ONDCP	Department of Justice (National Domestic Preparedness Office) and Federal Emergency Management Agency
Monitor Budgets Across Federal Agencies	ONDCP	Office of Management and Budget
Develop and Monitor Overall Performance Measures	ONDCP	No agency assigned to do this overall task.
Manage Research and Development	ONDCP	National Security Council (via the Technical Support Working Group)

Source: GAO analysis of counterdrug and counterterrorist programs.

This concludes our statement for the record. If you have any questions about this statement, please contact me at (202) 512-5104. Stephen L. Caldwell and Raymond Wyrsh made key contributions to this statement.

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