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2014 Quadrennial Homeland Security Review: Evolution of a Strategic Review

Overview

In June 2014, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported the second iteration of the *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review* (QHSR) to Congress. DHS states that the QHSR is a “comprehensive examination of the homeland security strategy of the Nation, including recommendations regarding the long-term strategy and priorities of the Nation for homeland security.”

The QHSR is a process in which DHS examines the nation’s homeland security strategy; the report delivered to Congress provides an explanation of this process. Neither the review process nor the report to Congress is the strategy, instead the 2014 QHSR (both the process and the report) are part of the constant reevaluation of the nation’s homeland security and part of the process by which the combined National and Homeland Security Staff develops the next iteration of the national security strategy. In 2010, the Obama Administration combined the national and homeland security strategies with its 2010 issuance of the *National Security Strategy*.

Congress originally tasked the National Homeland Security Council and staff to assess homeland security objectives, commitments, and risks in Section 904 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (HSA). Additionally, the council was to oversee and review homeland security policies. DHS is expected to issue the next iteration of the QHSR in 2018.

Review and Report Requirements

With the enactment of the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (9/11 Act), Congress required DHS to conduct a quadrennial homeland security review. Congress required both the QHSR review and report to include:

- prioritized missions;
- a description of the interagency cooperation, preparedness of federal response assets, infrastructure, budget plan, and other homeland security elements; and
- an assessment of DHS’s organizational structure with the national homeland security strategy.

Congress specifically required the DHS Secretary to consult with other federal entities, and required the review process to include:

- a delineated and updated national homeland security strategy; and
- a review and assessment of the effectiveness of DHS mechanisms for meeting the QHSR’s requirements, and turning those requirements into an acquisition strategy and expenditure plan within the department.

Additionally, Congress required the DHS report on the review to:

- provide a result of the review process;
- describe national homeland security threats;
- discuss the status of cooperation among all levels of governments in preventing terrorist attacks and responding to emergencies; and
- explain any underlying assumptions used in conducting the review.

Meeting QHSR Process and Report Requirements

Congress specifically tasked DHS with the QHSR process and report requirements in Section 707 of the HSA (as amended). It could be said that DHS met a significant number of the review process and report requirements with the FY2014 QHSR. DHS, however, only partially met the requirement to prioritize missions because the department only identified cross-cutting priorities instead of prioritizing missions. DHS did not provide a review and assessment of DHS mechanisms and programs for meeting the QHSR’s requirements, or for turning those requirements into an acquisition strategy and expenditure plan. Finally, DHS has not provided an updated national homeland security strategy, but instead provided the review, and its corresponding congressional report, of the nation’s homeland security strategy as embodied in the 2010 *National Security Strategy*.

DHS Response to FY2010 QHSR Shortcomings

In 2010, DHS issued the first QHSR, and it was criticized for not communicating the nation’s homeland security priorities, not comparing favorably to the Department of Defense’s *Quadrennial Defense Review*, and not identifying a budget plan or resources to secure the nation. One of the primary criticisms of the 2010 QHSR was the absence of homeland security strategic priorities.

In the 2014 QHSR, DHS states it will adopt strategic shifts and renewed emphases on the following priorities:

- securing against the evolving terrorism threat;
- safeguarding and securing cyberspace;
- countering biological threats and hazards;
- securing and managing flows of people and goods; and
- strengthening the execution of DHS’s mission through public-private partnerships.

The 2014 QHSR updated the missions and goals originally identified in the 2010 QHSR. DHS states that this reflects changes in the strategic environment where it; other federal, state, local, and tribal government entities; private sector partners; and other members of the homeland security enterprise have “matured, evolved, and enhanced” their homeland security capabilities. The 2014 QHSR has a section that provides an in-depth framework of the nation’s basic homeland security missions. DHS’s examination and work on missions and priorities is an attempt to address some of the 2010 QHSR shortcomings.

Another attempt to address criticism of the 2010 QHSR is the identification of federal, state, local, and tribal entities and private sector partners with homeland security responsibilities. Some of these partners include the Departments of Justice, State, Defense, Health and Human Services, Treasury, Agriculture, Commerce, Education, and Energy, and businesses and industry. Included in the 2014 QHSR is a table that identifies federal entities with *National Response Framework* responsibilities.

Potential 2014 QHSR Issues for Congressional Concern

Congress may wish to address these two potential issues with the QHSR:

- the continued absence of prioritized national homeland security missions; and
- the continued absence of an acquisition, budget, or fiscal plan associated with national homeland security missions.

Congress may wish to address the core issue of requiring DHS to review the nation’s homeland security considering the nation’s homeland security encompasses an endeavor that is more than the activities of DHS. In FY2014, the Office of Management and Budget reported that DHS was appropriated 49% of total “homeland security” funding, with 51% being appropriated to a number of other federal entities.

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