

U.S. Homeland Security: Reality or Myth? Domestic Counterterrorism Post-9/11

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M.A. Dissertation Evaluation

Alžběta (Bětko) Bernardyová has written her final M.A. dissertation on the matter of United States homeland security. It was a pleasure to supervise her work. Bětko has been one of my best students and she has always made her studies a top priority. Bětko studied two separate Master's courses and was employed at the same time. This is to her credit.

The work is divided into an introduction, six main chapters, and a conclusion. Each chapter contains a handy conclusion at the end, which makes it easier for the reader to keep up with Bětko's main points. In addition, there are a number of illustrative charts and graphs. The work is well-referenced and written using good English.

In the introduction, Bětko provides some limited historical background, which is most welcome. She immediately spells out that her first goal has been to answer the question of whether the homeland security agenda resulted in an efficient and unified system of U.S. counterterrorism measures based on enhanced information sharing. Bětko then poses her second question, which asks why a proper reorganization of the U.S. government did not materialize. She hypothesizes that three factors obstructed change, namely the nature of government agencies, rational choices of the President and Congress, and the fact that the homeland security agenda kept in mind the democratic values of the American citizenry.

Chapter 1 provides some insight into established theoretical, academic concepts surrounding national security. A colleague of ours (from another institute) is obsessed with such matters. He should be satisfied if he is lucky enough to read Bětká's dissertation. Her methodological (Eastonian systems) model is convincing and the reader is immediately acquainted with the overall direction of the treatise.

Chapter 2 analyzes U.S. counterterrorism strategy prior to 9/11. Her focus here is obviously on the post-Cold War period. She points out the shortcomings of national security elites and describes the organizational obstacles to post-Cold War, pre-9/11 change.

Chapter 3 represents a dissection of President George W. Bush's decision-making process in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. The Patriot Act is analyzed in detail as is the decision to establish the Office (Department) of Homeland Security. Also, the National Homeland Security Strategy of 2002 and its six main points are defined and explained in normal, unpretentious everyday language, something our esteemed colleague from another institute does not normally appreciate.

In Chapter 4, the formation and main tasks of the Department of Homeland Security are discussed. The agency's formation was riddled with problems from the outset. Of course, the main problem was rivalry between individual organizations. Bětká argues (rightly in my view) that government agencies became less, not more cooperative after 9/11.

Later reform of the intelligence community according to the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 forms the content of Chapter 5. Bětká

correctly points out the failings of the 2004 legislation, which, in the end, has not unified intelligence-gathering capabilities.

In Chapter 6, Bětka asks the following question: “Is a unified homeland security a realistic strategy”? Her answer is that unified homeland security is a work in progress, not something that could materialize during the Bush Administration.

Bětka recapitulates the main arguments of the previous chapters in the conclusion. Despite governmental efforts, a unified effective homeland security apparatus has not emerged. She does say that President Obama’s changes, manifested in the “all-hazards” approach, deserves the attention of future researchers.

I think that Bětka has produced a phenomenal piece of work that utilizes theoretical approaches without being enslaved by them. There is a nice balance of historical background and theory throughout the work. I recommend an **excellent** mark and I feel that the examination committee should consider a **Dean’s commendation**.

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