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# Nation At Risk:

## Policy Makers Need Better Information to Protect the Country

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For all the nation has invested in national security in the last several years, we remain vulnerable to terrorist attack and emerging national security threats because we have not adequately improved our ability to know what we know about these threats.

The Obama administration confronts a stark set of national security challenges including terrorism, instability from the global economic crisis, energy security, climate change, cybersecurity, and weapons of mass destruction. President Obama and his administration cannot identify, understand, and respond to these threats without the collaboration and sharing of information among officials across the government so fragments of information can be brought together to create knowledge. To improve decision making, the new administration needs to take immediate steps to improve information sharing.

Today, we are still vulnerable to attack because—as on 9/11—we are still not able to connect the dots. At the same time, civil liberties are at risk because we don't have the government-wide policies in place to protect them as intelligence collection has expanded.

*Since April 2002, the Markle Foundation Task Force on National Security in the Information Age, a diverse and bipartisan group of experienced former policymakers from the Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton and Bush administrations, senior executives from the information technology industry, and privacy advocates, have recommended ways to improve national security decision making by transforming business processes and the way information is shared.*

*Over the last few months, the Markle Task Force has interviewed multiple officials in the Executive Branch and the Congress on the state of information sharing in order to identify priorities for the new administration, which now includes several former Markle Task Force members.*

**The President and Congress must reaffirm information sharing as a top priority, ensuring that policymakers have the best information to inform their decisions.** We are at a critical moment, where immediate action at the start of the Obama administration is required. There is unfinished business in implementing an information sharing framework across all agencies that have information important to national security (including state and local organizations). If there is another terrorist attack on the United States, the American people will neither understand nor forgive a failure to have taken this opportunity to get the right policies and structures in place. An information sharing framework will allow government to collaborate effectively across diverse areas to inform policymakers better without undermining civil liberties.

**The President and Congress must ensure that all government information relevant to national security is discoverable and accessible to authorized users while audited to ensure accountability.** Otherwise we will remain vulnerable.

- When government officials have the capacity to locate relevant information and to make sense of it, they can find the right information in time to make better-informed decisions—including the prevention of terrorist attacks. Such a system of discoverability, rather than the creation of large centralized databases, improves our security and minimizes privacy risks because it avoids bulk transfers of data.
- When combined with an authorized use standard, discoverability ensures that users obtain what they need but only what they need. Such an authorized use standard permits analysts and others to obtain information based on their role, mission, and a predicated purpose.
- The necessary feature of auditing, which we recommend, allows for improved enforcement of the authorized use standard as well as contributing to enhanced information security.

**The President and Congress must develop government-wide privacy policies for information sharing to match the increased technological capabilities to collect, store and analyze information.** These policies must be detailed and address the hard questions not answered by current law—who gets what information for what purpose under what standard of justification. Without those privacy policies in place, the American people won't have confidence in their government, while the analysts and operatives using the information sharing framework won't have confidence that they know what they are expected and allowed to do, and that their work is lawful and appropriate.

**The President and Congress must overcome bureaucratic resistance to change.** Old habits die hard. The “need to know” principle and stovepiping of information within agencies persist. The adoption of the “need to share” principle and the responsibility to provide information, and actions to transform the culture through metrics and incentives, are necessary to the success of the information sharing framework. In addition, those who depend on information to make decisions and accomplish their mission must be empowered to drive information sharing, to ensure they get the best possible data.

These recommendations, which are detailed further in the report, are neither complicated nor technically difficult. They require strong, sustained leadership and attention to implementation. ■

**Read or download the full report at [www.markle.org/markletaskforce](http://www.markle.org/markletaskforce).**



