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There is security in sharing

INFORMATION NETWORK WOULD AID TERROR FIGHT

By Zoë Baird and James Barksdale

Today, our government still does not have the information it needs to fight terrorism. And the information it does have is isolated in different agencies, and therefore we cannot see its significance. While the discussion over how to implement the 9/11 Commission's recommendations to restructure the intelligence community is important, another key commission recommendation, creating a "trusted information network" to facilitate better information sharing among our intelligence agencies, needs immediate attention. Implementing such a network would make America safer today.

Information is key to fighting terrorism and enhancing our security. By adopting technologies used in the private sector every day, the government can set up a network that substantially improves our agencies' ability to share information in order to prevent terrorist attacks. With a presidential directive, our intelligence agencies could start the flow of valuable information immediately. For example, electronic directories could be quickly created to link all the analysts in different agencies working on the same problem, identify experts in the private sector and universities and indicate which agencies have information on subjects of interest.

The 9/11 Commission embraced the recommendations for creation of a Systemwide Homeland Analysis and Resource Exchange (SHARE) Network made last December by the Markle Foundation Task Force on National Security in the Infor-

mation Age.

The SHARE Network represents a "virtual reorganization" of government by fundamentally altering how information is used to facilitate better, faster decision-making at all levels of government. It can also be the best way to protect privacy and civil liberties by emphasizing use of anonymous data until an individual's identity is required; by restricting access to certain kinds of personally identifiable information; and by using systems to verify the identities of those permitted access. This can be coupled with guidelines governing the system and with oversight to both empower and constrain the participants involved.

Say a field agent at the Chicago FBI office and a CIA operative in Kabul become aware of separate leads that, if put together, might point to a bio-warfare attack in Chicago. Under the current system, reports from these two agents are unlikely to be put together or raise any red flags. However, using the SHARE Network, these reports would be linked through similar key words such as "virus" and "Chicago" or other linking tools. Instead of being housed in classified files, these reports would be distributed electronically to people who should see them. They also would be posted and available to be pulled by network participants with a particular interest. An analyst at the Terrorist Threat Integration Center, for example, might see both reports, contact the CIA and FBI agents and others to discuss their reports and begin to connect the dots.

The Markle task force has called on the president to issue a directive that would set the goal for creating the SHARE Network and include clear government-wide policy guidelines for the government's collection and use of domestic information, including private sector information about persons in the United States. By doing so, the president would provide the leadership necessary to overcome the systemic barriers to information sharing, which seriously hampered the efforts of our nation's intelligence agencies prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and unfortunately still exist today.

Information-sharing itself is not the goal; rather, it is the means by which we can effectively enhance security and protect privacy, by maximizing our ability to make sense of all available information. To accomplish this, we must shed our current "need to know" mentality and replace it with a culture based on the "need to share." The technology exists to build such a network; what's needed now is the leadership to get the information flowing.

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