

Too Fed-Centric

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Outside of New York City and Los Angeles, law enforcement agencies have a difficult time identifying homegrown terrorists. The primary reason is that, after the Sept. 11 attacks, America's approach to domestic counterterrorism became a federal enterprise. This flawed approach has resulted in a homeland security system that sees state and local law enforcement as data collectors rather than as boots on the ground using their decades of community policing experiences to stop crimes.

Federal agencies, unlike local law enforcement ones, are poorly suited to leverage community relationships to penetrate shadowy networks.

Instead of spending the last 10 years adding to the existing state and local law enforcement capabilities by making counterterrorism a career-enhancing profession with robust analytic, linguistic and investigatory capabilities, we expanded federal capabilities. Those federal capabilities, unlike local law enforcement, are disconnected from our communities and poorly suited to leverage existing community relationships to penetrate amorphous and shadowy networks.

Although we used federal funds to build more than 70 information and intelligence fusion centers, we failed to provide those centers with the proper resources. As a result, many of these centers are simply data providers, doing very little analysis and intelligence work. Compounding the problem is the redundancies and conflicts these Department of Homeland Security-led centers have with the Justice Department's Joint Terrorism Task Forces.

Because of our failure to properly balance our domestic counterterrorism enterprise between federal law enforcement and state and local law enforcement agencies, the men and women in the field don't have what they need in the places they need it. Fortunately, this failure has not resulted in a catastrophic terrorist attack, but our luck may be running out. The threat from homegrown terrorists is rising.

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