

Frontlines

WHAT DHS NEEDS: A NETWORK, NOT A FORTRESS

By NJ Slabbert
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Strategic thinking has always changed slowly. It took 19th century Boer snipers to show the British that neat formations of massed redcoats were obsolete in an age of guerrilla warfare. World War II compelled the United States and Britain to create new intelligence operations despite traditionalists like US Secretary of State Henry Stimson, who famously closed the State Department's code-breaking unit with the declaration: "Gentlemen don't read each other's mail."

In both eras, strategic customs had to adapt to face new enemies. A similar challenge confronts the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in establishing its new Washington, DC, headquarters. American public administration historically favors iconic buildings whose massiveness symbolizes institutional power. The Pentagon has three times the floor space of the Empire State Building. The Department of Defense proudly proclaims that it is "virtually a city in itself." Some 23,000 military and civilian workers converge on it daily in over 8,700 cars requiring 16 parking lots, and by rail. It has offices for around 3,000 more support personnel, and 17.5 miles of corridors.

The Pentagon was conceived (over a weekend) in a time when gigantic structures were made appropriate by America's seeming domestic impregnability. However, we now know that giant buildings on US soil are not only citadels but also targets, as witness the fate of the World Trade Center and the memories of the 184 people who died when American Airlines Flight 77 was hijacked by Al Qaeda terrorists and crashed into the Pentagon.

The plan for DHS

DHS' plan for an enormous \$3 billion headquarters in Anacostia, Washington, DC, should be urgently reconsidered. **It represents outdated thinking inappropriate to an era of high US vulnerability of strategic centers to terrorist attack.** It rests on obsolete assumptions about large, fortress-like buildings and the reliability of roads to transport vital personnel. Ironically, President Dwight Eisenhower created the highway system in the 1950s with rapid transport in mind—hence, it is called the Defense Highway System—but this infrastructure is **now so congested that it impedes strategic mobility and communication.**

Terrorist networks take full advantage of the geographical dispersal and communication advantages of teletechnology. **It would be a grave error for DHS to fall behind in creatively using these resources.** The technological dispersal of personnel and archives equips organizations to deal not only with terrorism but also natural disaster. When Hurricane Katrina devastated Grantham University's Louisiana campus, the school could proceed uninterruptedly to service over 8,000 students online, then swiftly establish a campus in Missouri, because it had digitized university data and dispersed it to a secure server in Virginia.

A technologically driven, dispersal-based alternative to DHS' current Anacostia plan was proposed in 2004. I reported on it for the **Harvard International Review** and **Urban Land**

Magazine; DHS called my reporting “excellent.” Submitted to DHS by former DoD planner **Alan Feinberg** and a systems engineer with five degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, **Jay Hellman**, the plan avoids concentrating personnel in a Pentagon-style headquarters, instead distributing DHS’ National Capital Region workplaces throughout Maryland, Virginia and elsewhere. These would enable staff to work close to home full-time, connected to headquarters 24 hours a day by secure fiberoptic Internet. This nationally implementable plan offers DHS security, efficiency, budget, environmental, transportation and staff working condition benefits.

La Plata, Md., has been put forward as a model locale to guide the siting of DHS telecommunities. Four secure fiberoptic networks intersect in the town, making a broadband grid possible immediately, followed by a regional network of telecommunities in Virginia and elsewhere.

Telesecurity through telework

In 2005, **Admiral William Owens**, former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff assigned to modernize the Department of Defense, described the telecommunity plan to me as “a fine example of the direction in which we should be heading,” adding that government must “work with the private sector imaginatively on pioneering projects of this kind if we are to maintain our world leadership in terms of prosperity and security.”

To evaluate this idea properly, **DHS should commission a geographic information system (GIS) map** displaying potential DHS work sites, key infrastructures, current DHS workforce distribution, town data, transport networks, fiberoptic grid facilities and other factors. **Much, if not all, the data needed for such a map is on hand within DHS via systems like the Homeland Security Infrastructure Program Gold.**

DHS’ dedicated people already have a hard enough task without being handicapped by an obsolete workplace location doctrine. Revisiting the 2004 plan will help the agency make a wise decision in the public interest.

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Zekiah Technologies, Inc. is exceptionally qualified to assist DHS in this GIS map / study task. Because of their on-going work for DoD and DHS and their core competency in GIS, hiring Zekiah would deliver the fastest and most cost-efficient results.

* *see attached short memos prepared by:*

The Hellman Company, inc.

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and by Zekiah Technologies, Inc.

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