

decisions need to be justified and popular support needs to be rallied in favor of the chosen course of action. All of these are, within our system, largely political actions – again, because they involve the balancing of competing political values and interests.

parts of the government to cooperate operationally with disaster response activities;

- (4) as a structural matter, **the senior operational official should be subordinate to and should report to the senior political official;**
- (5) **these two officials must have a close and mutually respectful working relationship**

directly, and they are promoted in part on the basis of selection rooted in performance and results. The consequence is that those who emerge into senior leadership positions are those whose combination of training and experience and personal attributes, skills, and talents have proven most effective in smaller scale, but related, challenges.

Need for a respected and powerful political “commander”

them happen; (2) to the constituencies affected; and (3) to the public at large. Political officials will, ultimately, be held responsible for the balancing of the competing interests – that is how and why they were chosen ahead of their competition in the last election – and they therefore need to be in a position to identify and engage these issues and render their determinations about them.

In our view, this implies the need for a senior and respected *political* official to “direct” the federal government’s political response to a catastrophic situation. Because response to a major catastrophe will necessarily involve the coordinated action by multiple federal

want. Realistically, however, this structure is designed not to encourage the substitution of civilian judgment for professional military judgment of generals and admirals, but rather to provide for civilian *oversight*, from a policy (rather than from an operational) perspective, of the nation's military actions. By analogy, the senior operational disaster response official could technically be overruled by the senior political official to whom he or she technically reports – but in practice this should be (extremely) rare.

We believe that it would be advisable to have the senior operational official serve for a fixed term, to vest a degree of independent, professional authority in the office. Statutory qualifications for the job should include prior training, experience – and success – in the operational command of disaster response.

While it is possible that in some cases the senior political and senior operational official could be the same person, we do not see a prospect that the nation will very often have as one of its senior political officials someone with the requisite operational experience, training, skills and expertise to combine the operational and political functions we have identified – and, at the very least, we think it would be a bad idea to rely on this consistently being possible. Conversely, we think it unlikely that people with the requisite operational background, training, skills, and expertise will very often also enjoy the respect *as a political decision-maker* of the most senior federal political officials – and, at a minimum, we think it risky to assume that such an individual can always be in the relevant role at the right time.

Furthermore, we believe it is both possible and desirable largely to separate the technical operational issues from the political issues. At the edges, of course, there will always be overlap – serving one set of interests rather than another (a political call) will have operational implications, and operational choices will influence how possible or easy it is to serve different constituencies. Thus, at the margin, the *policy and values* decisions will influence the *technical and operational* decisions, and vice versa. It is, therefore, in some sense, a fiction that they can be completely separated. But it is in our view a *useful* fiction, in the sense that *working on trying to separate them is useful and likely to improve both political and operational decision-making*.

The senior operational official and the senior designated political official will need to work in very close concert. In particular, many of the issues with significant political content will first arise as operational questions, and will come up through the operational “chain of command.” The question of how best to house the displaced people will, in the first instance, be confronted by technical managers. If, from a technical perspective, there is no real alternative (or if the best alternative is so much better from a technical perspective than the next best that any possible political implications would be small by comparison), then the decision is a technical one and should be made by the operational command. By contrast, when decisions about this issue will have significant political consequences, and there are real choices among viable technical alternatives with different political interests, the political elements need to be identified as a feature of the issue, and those aspects of the decision need to be examined by those responsible for balancing political considerations. This implies that, at all levels of the operational

command, the identification of political concerns is an important part of defining the issues.

As political issues surface – whether through the operational channels or otherwise – they have to be framed and resolved by the politically-responsible officials. This will necessitate close coordination between the senior political official and the senior operational official. Key to this relationship is mutual respect for the importance of the respective issues and respect for each other’s differing responsibilities and skills. Operational officials need to help frame the political issues that are arising and seek guidance about them. They need to keep political officials informed about the operational situation and the operational decisions they are making. Operational officials need to avoid treating as technical matters issues that have deep political content. (Conversely, political officials need to refrain from asking operational officials to pretend that issues with political content have to be resolved on technical grounds.) And political officials need to keep from interfering with what are largely technical decisions, reserving their authority for the issues where political concerns are of great importance. And on the issues where there are both important political *and* operational issues at stake, the two need to work together to resolve the questions.

We are not naïve enough to imagine that such an idealistic description will be self-executing. Making the system work in this way will not always be perceived as in the immediate self interest of the participants. It will require three inter-related elements:

First, *structural relationships* – a set of rules and expectations and norms about how people in these roles will behave – both independently and with regard to one another – and what constitutes legitimate and professional behavior;

Second, *practice* – repeated opportunities to enact the rule, expectations, and norms and carry out (either in simulations or in real situations); and

Third, *personal relationships* – the development of trust and mutual respect between people in different roles, based on appreciation of the importance of the role played by the other.

In short, this calls for an operational official who is sensitive to political matters – that is, who can recognize the political concerns and help frame them for a political decision-maker. It also calls for a political official who has some familiarity with operational disaster response – at least enough to understand how severe the risks will be if he or she starts second-guessing operational decisions.

Conclusion

Since, in any major catastrophe, there is more than enough work to do of both operational and political kinds to keep multiple senior officials fully engaged, and since the political and operational issues can usually be reasonably readily divided, and since the skills and

background necessary for these two roles are significantly different, it makes sense to have different officials working on them – in close coordination with one another, but separately. Both roles require a high degree of professionalism – but professionalism of different kinds. In a complex, urgent, confusing, high-intensity, rapidly-evolving, high-stress catastrophic event, the nation needs to have the services of a political professional to manage the conflicting priorities and values and to warrant and communicate the political decisions to a wide array of constituencies **and** the services of a seasoned, trained, experienced professional, proved in the crucible of earlier experiences, to command the operational response.

We hope that in your committee's work to redesign and oversee DHS, you will provide for both – for two answers, rather than one, to the question, "*Who should be in charge?*"