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Should Homeland Security Studies Survive?

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Abstract: A few years after the end of the Cold War, Richard Betts argued that a specter was haunting the field of strategic studies, “the specter of peace,” and asked whether that field should survive the new era. Today, more than two decades after the 9/11 attacks that stimulated the field of homeland security (HS) studies, we could ask a similar question about that field. Should it survive as an academic field of study, and if so, how should it adapt and change in an era in which concerns about terrorism have in large part been overtaken by great power competition, climate change, AI, pandemics and a host of other asymmetric threats? Is it/can it be an academic discipline? A profession? What questions does it ask and what contributions does it make to practitioners, policy makers, or society? This article reviews the state of HS studies today and what sub-fields and disciplines it touches. It examines HS publication and education in the United States and evaluates the contributions that HS studies have made to date. This review suggests homeland security studies should indeed survive, as a meta discipline that serves a valuable purpose by addressing the question of how governments and societies should best prepare for and respond to threats to their security that can range from local to global in scope, from small to large in scale, and from tame to wicked in character.

Keywords: academic disciplines; meta discipline; study of homeland security

1 Introduction

A few years after the end of the Cold War, Richard Betts argued that a specter was haunting the field of strategic studies, “the specter of peace.” Betts asked whether or not that field should survive the new era (Betts 1997). Today, more than two decades after the 9/11 attacks provided the stimulus for government change, policy focus, and academic research and teaching about homeland security, and at a time when much of the focus of the U.S. national security establishment has moved from terrorism toward state-based threats such as great power competition (for example Baron 2018,
O’Rourke (2022), we should ask a similar question about the field of homeland security (HS) studies. This article examines the question of whether and how homeland security studies should survive as an academic field of study. As part of that examination, it reviews the state of homeland security studies today. What is it, and where does it fit in?

Chris Bellavita asked a very similar question in 2011: “Are we finished with homeland security?” (2011, 6). He noted that if the academic field of homeland security is unable to demonstrate its value, “homeland security may devolve into a legacy concept, like the now largely forgotten idea of civil defense” (2011, 2). Earlier, in 2006, Bellavita and Ellen Gordon described the field of homeland security as being in “a pre-paradigm phase,” which they said meant that unlike other professional disciplines such as medicine or law, there was no general agreement about the topics that constitute the study of homeland security, and no dominant approach to teaching it. They believed that was a good thing because it provides the intellectual freedom needed in such a broad-ranging discipline as homeland security (Bellavita and Gordon 2006, 1).

Since that early “pre-paradigm phase,” significant progress has been made in the maturation of HS studies. There are several new journals, regular conferences, and academic degree programs that are well-established. In addition, there are several published peer reviewed studies that have begun to develop a consensus around HS education standards (Ramsay and Renda-Tanali 2018; Ramsay et al. 2010). Indeed, although reaching a consensus on the definition of “homeland security” remains elusive, the larger discipline of homeland security studies has continued to evolve and leverage other, related disciplines. In this way, HS studies is increasingly a meta discipline, like medicine, in that it is a discipline of disciplines (Ramsay 2013). Still, HS studies lacks a robust theoretical underpinning – although that too is maturing (Comiskey 2018; Ramsay, Cozine, and Comiskey 2021).

Following 15 years of evolution since the first homeland security degree programs emerged, this article argues that homeland security studies is beyond a mere emergent discipline and does indeed deserve to survive because it serves a valuable purpose as an interdisciplinary field focusing on the question of how governments and societies organize and function when faced with non-traditional, large-scale threats. Although homeland security connects with and draws upon many sub-fields and disciplines, the questions it asks and the contributions it makes suggest that it can be considered most closely modelled after the fields of international relations (IR) and security studies.

This article begins with a discussion of terms, noting that there is no generally agreed upon definition of “homeland security.” The next sections consider what questions are asked in homeland security studies, and what sub-fields and disciplines it touches. Subsequent sections review the state of homeland security...
publication and education in the United States today and evaluate the contributions
that homeland security studies have made to date. This article concludes that the
questions asked and the research and education done in HS studies strongly suggest
that the field should indeed survive, and that in fact the continuing challenges facing
American homeland security require even more attention to and growth of the
(relatively) new field of homeland security studies.

2 What Is Homeland Security?

When the concept of homeland security came into wide use after 9/11, the emphasis
was initially on terrorism, and for many the threat of terrorism remained the
defining aspect of homeland security. In 2011, Benjamin Friedman wrote that
“Homeland security means domestic efforts to stop terrorism or mitigate its conse-
quences” (Friedman 2011, 78). Still today the Department of Defense defines home-
land security as “A concerted national effort to prevent terrorist attacks within the
United States, reduce America’s vulnerability to terrorism, and minimize the damage
and recover from attacks that do occur” (Assistant Secretary of Defense 2022).1 But for
most scholars and practitioners the term has broadened to include law enforcement,
emergency management, border security, immigration, and other issues.2 In 2008
Bellavita asked of homeland security, “Is it a program, an objective, a discipline, an
agency, an administrative activity, another word for emergency management?”
(Bellavita 2008, 1). He set out seven definitions, which he described as “ideal types,”
ranging from an exclusive focus on terrorism, to broader definitions that add
increasing numbers of additional threats and concerns, possibly even including
major societal hazards such as the growing federal debt, and global warming.

In the first Quadrennial Homeland Security Review report released by the
Department of Homeland Security in 2010, homeland security was described broadly
as “a concerted national effort to ensure a homeland that is safe, secure, and resilient
against terrorism and other hazards where American interests, aspirations, and way
of life can thrive” (May et al. 2011, 288). A Congressional Research Service report
noted in 2013 that even though more than a decade had passed since the 9/11 attacks
placed “homeland security” on the public and scholarly agenda, there was still no
official or generally agreed upon definition of the term (Reese 2013). In 2019 another

1 It is notable that this definition is drawn directly from the George W. Bush Administration’s first
change in DoD thinking after 21 years.
2 A useful discussion of these definitional issues is Kiltz and Ramsay 2012, 2–4. They recognized the
importance of natural hazards and other aspects of homeland security but found that the primary
focus remained on terrorism.
CRS report found that “today, homeland security is a broad and complex network of interrelated issues” (Painter 2019, summary), but stated there is a “lack of consensus definition of what constitutes homeland security” (Painter 2019, 1). We seem no closer today to agreeing on a definition.

Several scholars have examined homeland security from a policy perspective, and found there is no consensus there, either. Warren Eller and Adam Wandt found there is a lack of a definition of the policy domain of homeland security (Eller and Wandt 2020), while Scott Robinson and Nicola Mallik studied how the term is defined by U.S. state policies and legislation and found—not surprisingly—a lack of consensus. Several states continued to equate homeland security with terrorism, as had been common immediately following the 9/11 attacks, but even more had adopted a broader, all-hazards definition (Robinson and Mallik 2015).

While homeland security may have emerged as a critical component of American national security after the 9/11 attacks, it is not a new concept. A predecessor to today’s homeland security is the civil defense effort of the Cold War that formed around the notion of domestic and civilian security with the goal of planning for a potential nuclear attack (May et al. 2011, 286). And as Robert McCreight has noted, “the dual imperatives of protecting the homeland and dealing effectively with local emergencies were with us long before that,” dating back at least to the establishment of urban fire brigades in Philadelphia in 1736 (McCreight 2011, 1).3 More recently (but still well before 9/11) the Report of the National Defense Panel in December 1997 called for an increased emphasis on homeland defense (National Defense Panel 1997).4 And the U.S. Commission on National Security (the Hart-Rudman panel) used the term “homeland security” in early 2001 (Reese 2013, 1).

The “homeland” part of the phrase homeland security has been controversial. William Safire wrote in 2002, “Americans have adopted homeland much as Russians chose motherland and Germans fatherland” (Safire 2002). Donald F. Kettl, author of a widely used text, System Under Stress, writes that “The ‘homeland security’ label rankled some Americans. To some, it sounded Hitler-esque, an echo of the German dictator’s plan to purify his homeland. Others thought it had an Orwellian ‘big brother’ feel to it” (Kettl 2007, 7).5 John Mueller and Mark Stewart argue that the phrase implies an inflation of the threat, “in its suggestion that essential security of

3 Homeland security defined more broadly predates the founding of the United States; for a discussion of homeland security and defense among the original Thirteen Colonies, see Rader 2002, 1–2.
4 Although the report of the Quadrennial Defense Review in May 1997 referred to threats to the homeland, it was the Report of the National Defense Panel, which was assigned the task of reviewing the QDR, that made the most detailed comments about the need for greater focus on homeland defense.
5 For a discussion of the history of the term “homeland” as well as “homeland security” and “homeland defense,” see Safire 2002 and Becker 2002.
the entire country is at stake. In Canada, the comparable department is labeled with more accuracy and less drama simply as ‘public safety’” (Mueller and Stewart 2011, 6).

Interestingly, although similar in meaning and execution to the United Kingdom’s “Home Office,” the term “homeland security” is used primarily in the United States. While the term is catching on elsewhere because of its use in the U.S., many other countries do not make as firm a distinction between domestic and foreign as is done in the U.S. (Greene 2022; Kaunert, Leonard, and Pawlak 2012; Morag 2011a, 1). In addition, varied threats, and challenges such as natural disasters, disease, and terrorism are not as closely linked overseas as they have become in the U.S. context. Nadav Morag notes that “The concept of homeland security is uniquely American largely because most other democratic countries do not distinguish as clearly between what in the United States was referred to by some as the ‘home game’ versus the ‘away game’” (Morag 2011a, 5).

Richard White argues that “Homeland security encompasses actions designed to safeguard a nation from domestic catastrophic destruction” (White 2018, 2). But Morag provides a broader and more useful definition. He writes that homeland security “is really a “system of systems” that encompasses a range of seemingly disparate fields that all share a common objective: the maintenance of public safety and security, the stability of society and the economy, and most crucially, the continuity of government” (Morag 2011a, 359). Increasingly, it appears as though homeland security, then, is about maintaining the functioning of the state and its ability to enforce its laws domestically. As Morag describes it, threats are largely identified by their scale as either a homeland security issue on the one hand, or a state or local problem on the other. A street gang is a law enforcement problem, not a homeland security issue; but if it morphed into a threat to the nation (or at least a threat beyond a single state), it would become a homeland security issue. A tornado can be a local tragedy, but not a homeland security issue, whereas a major disaster like Hurricane Katrina is a homeland security matter (Morag 2011a, 36). Terrorism, Morag convincingly argues, is its own category, because even when terrorist attacks affect only a small number of people, they represent a direct threat to the state and threaten the confidence of the people in their government.

More recent attempts to provide a definition include Ramsay, Cozine, and Comiskey, who argue that because homeland security may always be a contested term, the best we can do may be to come up with a broad, working definition. They see homeland security as an integrated effort involving all levels of government, public and private actors, and international partners, to protect the people, property, and territories of the United States from a wide range of natural, accidental, and manmade (but nonmilitary) threats (2021, 8).

While a precise if not consensus definition of the term “homeland security” may be up for debate, the term “homeland defense” is more clearly defined in American
usage. Inasmuch as United States national security benefited from its geographical isolation, so has it developed the view that there should be a natural and distinct separation between domestic and international security challenges. Homeland defense refers to defense against external threats, and is a primarily military activity, with the Department of Defense the lead agency. American military doctrine defines homeland defense as “the protection of US sovereignty, territory, domestic population, and critical infrastructure against external threats and aggression or other threats, as directed by the President of the US” (U.S. Department of Defense 2018, vii).

Although the Department of Defense is clearly in the lead for issues deemed to be “homeland defense,” there is no such clear-cut delineation of responsibilities for homeland security matters. While DHS is the lead federal agency for homeland security, it is not “in charge” of homeland security the way DoD oversees homeland defense. And because homeland security involves federal, state, local, and tribal government efforts, along with the private sector, the assignment of responsibilities is even more challenging.

3 Do These Distinctions Matter?

The Congressional Research Service noted that having a variety of homeland security definitions can hinder the development of national strategy and make Congressional oversight more difficult (Reese 2013, 9–10). These definitions and distinctions certainly matter in terms of policy and national strategy because different agencies are responsible for different parts of the problem. The Bush administration formed a Homeland Security Council (HSC) soon after 9/11, intending it to operate alongside the National Security Council (NSC) and to demonstrate the increased importance of homeland security as a national concern. Subsequently, the Obama administration merged the HSC back into the NSC and began to use the term “National Security Staff,” or NSS, to imply there is no distinction between national and homeland security.6 Although there has been some debate over whether it would be better to have a separate body that focuses specifically on domestic and homeland threats (Stockton 2009, Rosenzweig 2017), there seems to be little support for reestablishing the separate Homeland Security Council. Instead, some homeland security experts argue in the other direction, looking to integrate homeland security even more

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6 Indeed, very early on, the Obama Administration posed the question of the difference(s) between homeland and national security in its first Presidential Study Directive, PSD-1 in February 2009. In it, President Obama stated: “I believe that Homeland Security is indistinguishable from National Security – conceptually and functionally, they should be thought of together rather than separately.”
closely with national security by making the Secretary of Homeland Security a full, statutory member of the National Security Council (Warrick and Durkovich 2020).7

4 What Questions Does Homeland Security Ask?

One of the defining features of an academic discipline or field is the nature of the questions it asks and attempts to answer. International security studies scholars, for example, classically ask: what causes war? How can we maintain peace? How is military force used and managed? In order to understand the field of homeland security, then, we must ask what questions it poses; what questions and puzzles do scholars of homeland security grapple with? For the study of homeland security, for example, what problems are the equivalent of war and the use of force in international security studies?

In the months and years following the 9/11 attacks, the questions asked by homeland security studies fit easily within the established field of security studies. Scholars, policymakers, and the public wanted to know: what was the terrorism threat to the United States? How should government and society respond to that threat? A number of scholars examined how the United States intelligence community failed to anticipate and prevent the 9/11 attacks, and how that community had been reformed since then. Amy Zegart is only one of many who found that intelligence failure is a key aspect of what might be called the homeland security “problematique” (Zegart 2005).8

Ashton Carter wrote soon after the 9/11 attacks that “The challenge of catastrophic terrorism is destined to be a centerpiece of the field of international security studies… for the foreseeable future” (Carter 2001/2002, 6). He noted that “the security institutions of the U.S. federal government are particularly ill-suited to deliver homeland security” (2001/2, 7–8). Catastrophic terrorism, in particular, he argued, did not fit within any existing managerial category for the federal government—it is neither war, crime, nor disaster, but involves national security, law enforcement, and disaster relief agencies. Carter wrote that the mission of protecting the American

7 The DHS secretary is named to the NSC by presidential directive or policy, but the only officials named to the NSC by law are the president, vice president, secretary of state, secretary of defense, secretary of energy, and secretary of the treasury.
8 The term “problematique” is a reference to Peter D. Feaver’s classic article, “The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control” (Feaver 1996). In that article Feaver challenged the key theories behind the civil military relations literature; while it may be too early for such a work to be written about the homeland security literature, one goal for homeland security scholars might be to develop theories and approaches that could someday be debated in such a way. Notably, a seminal attempt at this is the text Theoretical Foundations in Homeland Security: Strategies, Operations and Structures (Ramsay, Cozine, and Comiskey 2021).
homeland from catastrophic terrorism is too large and varied to be given to any one
organization or individual, and instead would require a multi-year, multi-agency effort.

Scholars examined whether specific programs, such as the widely criticized and
ultimately abandoned Homeland Security Advisory System and its color-coded
warnings of threat levels, had been successful in reducing the terrorism risk (Shapiro
and Cohen 2007). Others asked questions about other aspects of the state of America’s
security, such as whether U.S. borders are secure (Alden and Roberts 2011, Wein, Lie,
and Motskin 2009). Still others observed that the maintenance of border security is an
activity of the federal government but is also of keen interest to state and local
governments; and border security is almost by definition a matter of international
security, providing an example of how homeland security issues are not simply
domestic but also international problems (Andreas 2003).

While early studies focused on policy and organization to address the problem of
terrorism, following Hurricane Katrina scholars examined the government’s
response to natural disasters (Wise 2006). Katrina made it clear that despite the
formation of DHS and its integration of the Federal Emergency Management Agency
(FEMA), the nation had not focused sufficiently on preparation for and responses to
natural or human made disasters. In the words of President George W. Bush, “the
system, at every level of government was not well coordinated, and was over-
whelmed in the first few days” (Wise 2006, 303). In particular, Katrina challenged the
fundamental assumption in American disaster management that incidents are to be
managed locally, with federal support coming only when and if a governor requests
assistance (Wise 2006, 307).

Much of the research on terrorism and other extreme risks has focused on what
might be considered the two ends of the problem: prevention on the one hand, and
response after the fact on the other. But some experts have argued that greater
attention should be placed on mitigation: efforts taken that can reduce the damage
caused by terror attacks or other disasters (Roberts 2009). We would agree and
extend Roberts’ observation that the wickedness of the typical homeland security
problem set calls for better social and economic resilience strategies that would often
be part of a larger, state and community-based mitigation strategy.

More recently homeland security, terrorism, and security studies scholars have
asked broader questions about the terrorist threat, such as whether the threat is growing
or overblown (Mueller and Stewart 2011). And long before the January 6, 2021, assault on
the Capitol put a spotlight on domestic terrorism, scholars were debating whether the
threat from domestic, “home-grown” terrorists has overtaken that from international
groups such as al Qaeda (Brooks 2011). And even more recently, homeland security
studies have examined the question of how government and society should respond to
new threats that do not fall into the traditional categories of national and international
security, such as climate change and infectious disease.
The fundamental questions asked by homeland security studies, primarily in the United States and as seen in the HS literature, are listed below in Table 1.

Table 1: Central questions asked in homeland security studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the key threats to homeland and domestic security?</td>
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<td>In particular, what large-scale, nontraditional threats do government and society face? Should all threats and challenges that rise above the ability of state and local authorities to address be considered as homeland security issues?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What should be done about these threats?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How can government and society prepare for and respond to domestic and HS threats and challenges?</td>
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<td>How does society decide which threats should be given priority?</td>
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<td>Who is in charge?</td>
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<td>What is the division of responsibility between federal authorities on the one hand, and state and local authorities on the other? Between military and civilian authorities? Between government and the private sector?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How can security and liberty be balanced?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How far should government authority, especially in the areas of intelligence and law enforcement, be extended domestically before it is seen as infringing too far on civil liberties and personal freedoms?</td>
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These questions raise several important issues and tensions. The first tension concerns the American federal structure of government and the debate over whether HS threats are best addressed centrally, or at the state and local level. This tension is perhaps best exemplified by new and emergent concerns from public health threats such as COVID-19 (McDonald et al. 2020) and climate change (Brown 2012). How should government be organized to best ensure national (if not human) security in the face of such nontraditional threats? How should the functions of government be distributed for homeland security? How should the interagency process be modified for large scale, global and nontraditional threats? What tasks are performed by the federal government, as opposed to state and local governments? (Dahl 2021a; Thacher 2005) While much of the literature focuses on the top-level problem of federal government organization (Perrow 2006), other scholars have studied the ways in which state and local institutions have responded to homeland security threats (Caruson and MacManus 2006; Chenoweth and Clarke 2010; Waxman 2009). Samuel Clovis writes that the challenges of homeland security have meant that “for the first time in decades, the nation’s essential philosophy of government needed to be reexamined” (2006, 2).

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A second tension is between military and civilian authorities and responsibilities. Even though, as discussed above, the definitional distinction between homeland “security” and “defense” is relatively clear within the American context, there remain many unsettled questions about how much of a role the military should take on in the case of major natural disasters and other risks to national security. Besides the traditional involvement of the National Guard during times of natural disasters, scholars have examined, for example, the role of the Department of Defense in providing military equipment to local police departments (Brooks 2020), the use of military personnel and capabilities in the COVID-19 pandemic (Nevitt 2020), and the involvement of active duty and national guard forces in policing racial protests in 2020 (Dunlap 2020).

A third tension is between the need for greater security and the requirement to ensure civil liberties and the fundamental freedoms of our society. Ripberger has described a “core dialectic” about homeland security policy in the United States as being “to what degree is the public willing to sacrifice civil liberty and civil rights in order to enhance national security?” (2011, 79). Other scholars have examined the balance between security and liberty in such areas as the use by law enforcement of video cameras (Coxon and Zoufal 2021), and domestic intelligence surveillance (Levinson-Waldman and Panduranga 2021).

And a fourth tension focuses on the problem of risk management, especially concerning major disasters and catastrophes (Birkland 2009) and what have been called “high impact, low probability” or HILP risks (Dahl 2015). How should government and society assess domestic risks and challenges and decide where to place its resources and efforts? As one textbook puts it, “Securing the homeland is fundamentally a matter of risk management, in which limited resources are applied to an essentially unlimited list of potential tasks” (Jordan et al. 2009, 128).

5 The Study of Homeland Security: where Does It Fit in?

Above, we referred to homeland security studies as a meta discipline. As such, HLS touches on (if not leverages) a surprisingly wide variety of other disciplines and fields. It may most closely relate to the fields of security studies, where scholars such as John Mueller have written extensively about homeland security from a terrorism perspective (Mueller 2010). But it is also closely linked to a number of other traditional academic disciplines. Scholars in fields such as public policy (Ripberger 2011) and

10 As another example of the close connection between security studies and homeland security, the latest edition of a standard text in national security studies (Meese et al. 2018) includes a chapter on homeland security.
public administration (Raadschelders and Lee 2011) have examined how their fields intersect with homeland security, while others have studied homeland security from the perspective of risk analysis (Wein et al. 2009), risk management (Alexander 2012), cyber security (Zeadally 2014), criminal justice (Johnson and Hunter 2017; Oliver 2009), intelligence (Dahl 2011), and public health (Pilkington and Kumar 2020). Emergency management, which is widely considered a professional discipline (Wilson and Oyola-Yemaie 2001), is particularly closely linked to homeland security studies, as is indicated in the title of this journal—*Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.*

None of this, however, seems enough to help determine where the study of homeland security fits into the broader academic and professional world. Scholars have examined the role of homeland security studies from a number of perspectives over the past two decades. What have they found?

A number of studies have compared the state of homeland security studies with that of other fields. Bellavita, for example, noted (2012, 25) that homeland security might be comparable to the health profession, which he calls a meta-discipline that combines numerous disciplines, problems, bodies of knowledge, and inquiry methods. More recently Bellavita has written that “Eighteen years after September 11, 2001, homeland security is still not a discipline,” and there is no consensus on what homeland security is (2019, 5). Staupe-Delgado et al. have described homeland security studies as one of a number of fields of study that would like to be elevated to the status of discipline, but face questions about whether they should be considered applied, professional, or normative—intended to provide support for policymaking rather than to provide objective, neutral research (2022).

A few experts have suggested that the term “homeland security” be dropped; Sheldon Greaves, for example, proposed using the term “strategic security” for a field of study that encompasses terrorism, intelligence, and protection (2010). But more often, researchers have recommended ways that homeland security scholars can build on experiences from other fields. Ufot Inamete has argued that the academic discipline of management can contribute to the study of homeland security (2006). Several scholars have noted lessons for HLS from the study of public administration. Michael Falkow has described HS as an emerging discipline that faces many of the same challenges of definition that the field of public administration faced (2013). And several faculty members of the Penn State University homeland security program have argued that the debate over whether homeland security is a profession, or a discipline is not particularly important. Instead, echoing the comment of an early

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11 For another example of the close relationship between homeland security and the established fields of emergency management and disaster response, see Miskel 2006.

12 Or rather, Bellavita has a character in his rather poetic article make this argument.
scholar of public administration, they believe that homeland security should “try to act as a profession,” and that homeland security should model itself after the early years of the field of public administration (Plant et al. 2011). This argument, though interesting, is somewhat specious. Acting like a profession would of course entail a definition based on a consensus set of education outcomes and would include an apparatus, such as accreditation, that could ensure that such outcomes are achieved in academic degree programs.13

May, Jochim and Sapochichne describe homeland security as a policy regime that has developed to address public risks across multiple subsystems, such as border protection, food safety, and public health (2011, 289). Linda Kiltz asked in 2011, “Should homeland security be a subfield of public administration, political science, criminal justice, national security, or something else, or should it be developed into a new academic discipline?” (2011, 12). She argued it was too soon to tell whether it is a subfield in a traditional discipline, a multidisciplinary endeavor, or a new interdisciplinary field.

Rose McDermott examines four established areas of study in order to determine whether homeland security might find a home within one or more of them: peace studies, security studies, international relations, and social psychology (2010). She finds the fit to be best within security studies, but even there it is far from perfect. For example, security studies has a more international focus than homeland security does, and while security studies typically focuses at state-level actions, homeland security is just as concerned with the local level as with the federal level. However, making matters a bit murkier, the Department of Homeland Security has in recent years significantly expanded its activities abroad, such as stationing Customs and Border Protection officers at major airports overseas, giving DHS the third-largest overseas footprint of any civilian US agency other than the State Department and the CIA (Lawson, Bersin, and Kayyem 2020, 273).

McDermott goes on to argue (2010) that homeland security studies requires a diversity of methods, theories, and approaches, and does not fit well into any existing paradigm or field of study. Instead, she argues that the study of homeland security is best addressed through a problem-focused approach that “allows scholars from different areas to come together around a particular problem or focus.” Examples of how such approaches have been successful, she writes, include the fields of psychology, criminology, and environmental studies. She argues that homeland security issues can best be addressed by forming interdisciplinary, problem-focused research programs on specific problems and threats.

13 For a more complete discussion on the characteristics of a profession, see Ramsay (2013), and Ramsay and Renda-Tanali (2018).
Marcus Holmes suggests that the discipline of “homeland security affairs,” as he termed it, would benefit by modeling itself after the study of international relations, which has developed and advanced through a series of internal debates over questions of methodology and the nature of the international system (2012). He argues that homeland security should not be subsumed into the field of IR—that is not where the new field “fits.” But as an example of how homeland security could benefit from seeing IR as a model, he notes that diplomacy is an especially important topic for IR and suggests that “diplomacy may be the oil in the machine of IR” (2012, 9). As noted above, we might posit that in the field of international security, the prime mover—the oil in the machine—is the use or threat of military force. It may be useful for homeland security scholars to consider, what is the oil in the machine of homeland security? What factor plays the fundamental role equivalent to diplomacy or military force in those other fields?

6 Homeland Security Education

Education is a fundamental aspect of any academic field, and here homeland security studies has advanced significantly in the past two decades. The first major attempt to examine the challenges of homeland security education was the formation of the Homeland Security and Defense Education Consortium (HSDEC), originally created in 2003 as an effort by U.S. Northern Command (Ramsay et al. 2010; Ramsay and Renda-Tanali 2018; Supinski 2011). It later was renamed the Homeland Security/Defense Education Consortium Association (HSDECA) and became an independent non-profit organization in 2007.

As of 2010, almost 400 colleges and universities offered courses and programs in homeland security (Bellavita 2011, 3). By 2019, several colleges and universities had developed doctoral level homeland security programs and the number of homeland security-related academic programs in the United States was listed as 460 (Ramsay, Cozine, and Comiskey 2021, 3).14 A number of high-quality homeland security textbooks have been published, several in multiple editions.15

Kendra Stewart and John Vocino examined the state of homeland security education in the U.S. in 2013 and found a lack of shared learning outcomes and standards (Stewart and Vocino 2013). John Comiskey reviewed college homeland security

14 We should note that Joseph Simons-Rudolph (2020) examined 110 graduate-level homeland security academic programs and argued that because relatively few of these programs focus exclusively on homeland security, the field of homeland security education “is smaller than presented in the literature.”
curricula in 2014 and found that there is “no common or core homeland security curricula standard” (Comiskey 2015, 21). He wrote that although colleges and academics “are beginning to recognize homeland security as an academic discipline,” there still was no consensus about what homeland security is (2015, 20). He argued the discipline needed to be seen as a profession, and in order to get there “Academics must come to a consensus about what homeland security actually is” (2015, 34).

Some of the most recent research in homeland security education has been conducted by Ramsay and Renda-Tanali, who argue (2018) that HLS is an emerging, meta discipline, which should be seen more as a “practice discipline” such as medicine, nursing, or law.

7 Homeland Security Research: What Contributions Has This Field Made?

Bellavita wrote in 2010 that he was not aware of any notable scientific achievements that had been generated as a result of looking at security related issues through a homeland security academic or intellectual framework. But he argued this may have been because not enough time had yet passed to allow a “homeland security perspective” to make an intellectual contribution to national security (Bellavita 2011). A similar conclusion was reached that same year by Donahue, Cunnion, Balaban, and Sochats, who argued that in the emerging field of homeland security and emergency management, the academic tasks of teaching and service were being accomplished satisfactorily. But it was in the area of research that they found, that the least gains had been made (Donahue et al. 2010). They argued for “service-directed research” in which peer-reviewed publications would lead to products and procedures that contribute to the public good.

One sign that a new field of study has come of age is that new journals form around it. Several journals have been established focusing on homeland security, and while they are primarily online, peer-reviewed periodicals rather than “brick and mortar” hardcopy journals, their existence does suggest the field is developing, maturing, and growing. Top journals include Homeland Security Affairs (HSAJ) published by the Center for Homeland Defense and Security at the Naval Postgraduate School,16 and the Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (JHSEM)17 The newest peer-reviewed journal in the field is the Journal of Security, Intelligence, and Resilience Education (JSIRE), formerly the Journal of Homeland

Security Education. JSIRE focuses on the scholarship of teaching and learning, a hallmark of a maturing discipline.

The preceding sections have described some of the key questions that have been asked by homeland security studies. What answers have been reached, in homeland security journals as well as in other publications and outlets? What is the state of homeland security research today?

From the perspective of the political scientist, perhaps the most significant academic contribution thus far has been in what homeland security research has told us about American politics, government, and society. This tends to confirm the finding of Staupe-Delgado et al. that “homeland security bears all the hallmarks of an Americanised political construct” (Staupe-Delgado et al. 2022, 6). But it appears (based on only a limited study to this point) that scholars working within the mainstream of American political science have tended to neglect the study of homeland security. For example, a search of the phrase “homeland security” in the American Political Science Review reveals only seven articles that used the phrase during the first decade following the 9/11 attacks, from 2002 through 2011.19 Several dealt with terrorism, such as the well-known article by Robert Pape on “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism” (Pape 2003).20 The only major article with a significant homeland security focus that was not about terrorism was by Andrew Healy and Neil Malhotra on “Myopic Voters and Natural Disaster Policy” (Healy and Malhotra 2009). Examining data on natural disasters, government spending, and election returns, they showed that voters reward public officials for delivering disaster relief spending, but not for investing in disaster preparedness spending. The same search for APSR articles from 2012 through 2021 identified only four that used the phrase “homeland security.”

A search of articles published in the American Journal of Political Science (AJPS) resulted in a similar finding. From 2002 through 2011, only 12 articles published in AJPS referred to “homeland security,” and most of these were focused on topics that would not normally be considered homeland security issues, such as domestic politics. From 2012 through 2021, there were again 12 articles published that referred to “homeland security,” with most of these articles making only passing or secondary reference to the concept, such as in referencing the Department of Homeland Security.

18 https://jsire.org/.
19 Search made using JSTOR, February 20, 2022, searching for all uses of the term “homeland security” in articles (not reviews or other items) published from 2002 through 2011.
20 Another article focusing on terrorism was Powell 2007. Several of the articles referred to homeland security or the Department of Homeland Security only secondarily.
21 Search conducted using JSTOR, February 20, 2022.
The journal *Political Science Quarterly*, which has a greater focus on policy relevant research than many other political science publications, has published more articles on homeland security topics than either APSR or AJPS.\textsuperscript{22} From 2002 through 2011 it published 21 articles using the term, a number of which focused on issues central to homeland security studies scholarship such as terrorism and intelligence. But from 2012 through 2021 that number went down to 13, suggesting either a reduced interest in the topic among scholars more recently, or a greater number of more relevant journals such as HSAJ or JHSEM, or obviously, some combination.

It appears that scholars working in international relations, and in particular within the popular subfield of international security, have been more inclined to conduct research on topics associated with homeland security. A search of the journal *International Security* revealed 25 articles using the term “homeland security” published from 2002 through 2011, covering a wide variety of topics of interest to homeland security scholars and practitioners, including not only terrorism, but also border security, intelligence, and biosecurity.\textsuperscript{23} But from 2012 through 2012 only 14 articles were published referring to homeland security, suggesting a decline in interest.

The interest in homeland security topics was also seen in the journal *Security Studies*, which has a more theoretical focus than *International Security*. *Security Studies* published 14 articles referring to homeland security from 2002 through 2011, several of which examined topics that would fall within most definitions of homeland security studies.\textsuperscript{24} For example, Matthew Kroenig and Jay Stowsky examined (2006) how the war on terrorism affected the growth of state power in the United States after 9/11. From 2012 through 2021 the journal published 13 articles discussing homeland security, most of which dealt with topics of concern to homeland security scholars such as terrorism, cyber, and intelligence.

Despite this relative lack of attention from mainstream political scientists, the study of homeland security has grown significantly in the last 21 years through the work of scholars from many different disciplines and fields. Key contributions have come in two areas: first, by focusing attention on new domestic threats and challenges, and second, on the requirement for new policies and organizations to deal with those challenges.

In the areas of threats and challenges, much of the most significant work has (not surprisingly) been done concerning terrorism. John Mueller and Mark Stewart, for example, have described (2011) the tensions involved when a society must address

\textsuperscript{22} Search conducted using JSTOR, February 20, 2022.
\textsuperscript{23} Search conducted using JSTOR, February 20, 2022.
\textsuperscript{24} This search was conducted using Taylor and Francis Online.
competing needs with only limited resources. They argue that U.S. government officials have failed to apply appropriate risk assessment and cost-benefit tools in attempting to determine the level and direction of homeland security expenditures, and that the result has been an overreaction and excessive spending on counterterrorism.

Some of the most interesting and potentially significant work has been to highlight lesser-known threats, such as to agriculture security (McCreight 2022), and to advance our understanding of threats that are already firmly on the national agenda, such as climate change. O’Sullivan and Ramsay, for example, write that that “Climate change risks fit squarely within a (somewhat) broadened, more complex post-Katrina interpretation of a homeland security enterprise” (2015, 44).25

Much of the literature in homeland security studies has examined ways that government and society can address such challenges. As Nadav Morag writes, “the legal and institutional tools with which the United States is able to deal with threats outside its borders... differ markedly from those it is able to employ inside its borders” (2011b, 1). Important research has concerned disaster response and resilience (Cutter and Derakhshan 2019), including cutting edge topics such as the use of space technology for warning, intelligence collection, and response management of disasters and other emergencies (Simental et al. 2021). A number of scholars have examined the public health and government response to the coronavirus pandemic (Dahl 2020, 2023; Larranaga 2020; Pohlman et al. 2021).

Scholars have examined the Department of Homeland Security and its component organizations, sometimes from a broad perspective (Dahl 2021b), but often with a narrower focus (Kahan 2013). Researchers have developed models to determine how limited government resources can be allocated to best reduce the threat of terrorism (Keeney and von Winterfeldt 2011). Others, working largely in the areas of public policy and public administration, have studied how well the U.S. government has coordinated its functions to make the country safer, and they have generally concluded that the effort has been less than successful (Brattberg 2012). In 2007 Paul Light described the result as “the homeland security hash” (Light 2007)26 and more recently others have argued that the January 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol represented a broad failure of American homeland security and intelligence (Dahl 2021b; Silber 2021).

Some of the strongest contributions have been made by scholars and practitioners working in areas in which other, more firmly established subfields intersect with homeland security. In the field of intelligence studies, for example, scholars have contributed by asking questions beyond those traditionally examined in the

25 See also Comiskey and Larranaga 2019.
26 See also, May et al. 2011.
intelligence literature (which often appears somewhat mired amid debates over ways to improve intelligence analysis and prevent failure and surprise). Work related to homeland security has asked about the limits and capabilities of domestic intelligence; Charles Perrow, for example, analyzed the failings of DHS intelligence (2006), while Christian Beckner (2021) argued years later that the department’s intelligence arm had still failed to live up to its potential. Other intelligence scholars have examined the developing network of intelligence fusion centers at the state and local level (Lewandowski and Guidetti 2018), and the extensive domestic intelligence effort mounted by the New York City Police Department (Milliman and Landon-Murray 2021).

There are, to be sure, improvements that can be made in homeland security studies. Joseph Simons-Rudolph (2020) examined the state of homeland security research and found it to be wanting. He reviewed 71 articles published in homeland security journals and found “a low level of methodological sophistication” in them (2020, xvi). In addition, the lack of a central organizing question or problem remains a major limitation for the field of homeland security studies. Morag argues (2012) convincingly that the academic discipline of homeland security should be a broadly-based, interdisciplinary field that focuses on policymaking and the creation of practitioners and scholars who are generalists, and who are able to integrate a wide variety of specialties and areas. But it needs a central focus, a prime mover, or a problematic if it will ever be more than a fleeting concern on par with civil defense.

The trajectory of homeland security studies over the past two decades suggests that such a central focus may be developing. In the early months and years after 9/11, the problem was the threat of mass terrorism, but today the focus has broadened. As Morag has written, that focus is best described as asking: how does government and society respond to the most serious of security threats, other than conventional war? More recently, a study for the Atlantic Council came to a similar conclusion, arguing that the Department of Homeland Security “needs to refocus its mission to lead the defense of the United States against major nonmilitary threats” such as infectious disease, cyber threats, threats to election security and critical infrastructure, and domestic terrorism (Warrick and Durkovich 2020, 1).27 This is an excellent expression of where homeland security studies should focus.

27 A study for the Center for American Progress reached similar conclusions but placed more emphasis on a move by DHS away from its focus on foreign threats, and from its increasingly large law enforcement effort, toward those domestic support missions where DHS has unique responsibilities and capabilities, such as disaster relief, cybersecurity, and emergency management; see Rudman et al. 2021.
8 Where to Next?

Even though there is no consensus on just what the scope and definition is of homeland security studies, the field has over the past two decades reached most of the benchmarks that scholars such as Bellavita have argued would be needed in order to be established as a discipline. There is an identified set of problems and questions, well established research programs, several popular textbooks, and a large number of undergraduate and graduate level programs. Further, our research has shown that while less research is published under the aegis of “homeland security,” far more is published under specific application areas such as terrorism, emergency management, climate change, etc. This is not very different from medicine as there are clearly more articles published under the aegis of and in journals dedicated to specific aspects of medicine (orthopedics, cardiology, endocrinology, etc.) than under the more generic term “medicine.”

Although homeland security studies touch on a wide range of disciplines and fields, it is likely to serve its most valuable purpose in the future as an interdisciplinary academic field closely associated with—but not dominated by—the study of international relations and international security. It might best be described as a meta discipline, or a “pracademic” discipline, recognizing the close linkage between academics and practitioners in homeland security affairs (Hastings and Stern 2019). It could also be considered an “applied discipline,” similar to medicine, law, nursing, or engineering. The principal focus is on the question of how governments and societies organize and function when faced with large-scale, non-traditional threats. Morag may have expressed it best when he described the fundamental problem of homeland security this way: “that of maintaining social and economic stability and governmental functioning in the face of events that threaten to overwhelm the capacity of government and society to cope” (Morag 2011b, 1).

In the context of the United States, “homeland security studies” contributes by (re)examining the ways that America sees its place in the world, and its security, in a very different light than it used to. Given the rise in new journals, conferences, and academic degree programs, scholars and students alike are rethinking how they organize themselves and how they maintain the nation’s security. The threats and concerns involved are much broader than terrorism, even though terrorism remains for many the nucleus around which the edifice of homeland security is constructed. For example, social justice, white nationalism, climate security, cybersecurity, public health, and environmental security issues each provide examples of threats and threat vectors that are increasingly wicked and asymmetric, making specific lines of

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28 See also the new ejournal Pracademic Affairs, at https://www.hsaj.org/pracademicaffairs/about.
research into how best to manage them a distinct area of contribution moving forward.  

The threats facing the American nation—the homeland—have changed dramatically in the past two decades, and the problem for American government and policy is not just that the country faces new and greater domestic threats, although that would be enough to justify the establishment of new research agendas for scholars and practitioners. The challenge is made more complex because globalization and transcendent threats to public health and from climate change blur the lines between what is considered foreign, and what is domestic security. As the Secretary of Homeland Security has written (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2023, cover letter p. 3), “Our homeland security and national security are inextricably linked.” Threats that might in the past have been strictly an overseas issue can today quickly develop into homeland security threats for the United States. Terrorism is an obvious example, but other important threats include the spillover of Mexican criminal violence into the United States, and the quick spread of diseases such as COVID-19. Similarly, lines are becoming blurred between threats that are a military responsibility, and those that are strictly a civilian function; and between those that are a federal responsibility, and those that call for response by state and local governments.

Richard Betts had a firm answer in 1997 about whether strategic studies should survive as a field of study—certainly it should, he wrote. The evidence seemed strong that war was not going away as a concern, and he argued that university faculties should make hiring decisions “on the basis of long-term evidence of what has mattered in world politics rather than recent events, intellectual fads, or moral hopes” (Betts 1997, 33). Today, it seems equally clear that the problem of nontraditional, large-scale threats to the homeland—including, but not limited to terrorism, public health, and climate change—will be with us for some time. To better understand these threats and examine how government and society should respond, we need to continue to develop homeland security studies as a meta, pracademic discipline that retains close links to the international relations, intelligence, public health, cybersecurity as well as the broader security studies (academic and practitioner) communities while continuing to establish its own academic and practitioner identity.

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29 For a brief discussion of wicked versus tame problems in the context of homeland security, see Ramsay, Cozine, and Comiskey 2021, 7–8.
References


