FEMA

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# Introduction

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which was a result of the Executive Order from 1979, was formulated by the Carter administration (Jones, Kovacich, & Kovacich, 2012). The participation of the federal government to the corresponding emergency management has a brief history. Before the year 1950, the handling of disaster relief had been handled largely from ad hoc, which was generally managed by the Office of Emergency Management in the President's Executive Office. There was a change in approach observed in the year 1950, as the federal disaster relief was formalized with the Disaster Relief Act of the year 1950. The federal agencies were authorized by the Disaster Relief Act through the President's authority for the provision of assistance to the localities and states during the overwhelming of states or localities by any significant catastrophe or disaster.

# Discussion

With the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in the result of the Homeland Security Act in the year 2002, FEMA was placed under the DHS leadership. The reason for putting FEMA under the DHS was 9/11, as it was realized that every component of the homeland security must be put together for working more effectively. Even when placing FEMA under the DHS was considered to be an effective approach, which can be documented by the response of the DHS to the natural disasters which include California Wildfires and Hurricane Ike. But the authorities stating that FEMA must be taken out of the DHS refer to the response of FEMA to hurricane Katrina as a proof FEMA has not been able to reach the excellence as thought under the DHS leadership (Nigg, Barnshaw, & Torres, 2006). Hurricane Katrina was one of the unsuccessful stories for the disaster response force led by DHS, but there are several reasons why FEMA must be kept within the DHS.

By placing FEMA out of the DHS, the Americans would not become safer from the acts of natural disasters or terrorism. First responders, not FEMA, acts as the primary players during the early 24-72 hours when struck by a disaster. Concerning the properties and lives to be saved, these individuals make a real difference. The response would not be made any more seamless for the FEMA falling under the cabinet level. FEMA must be able to efficiently and quickly collaborate with the fellow agencies in the DHS for providing an adequate response on the federal level when required. U.S. Coast Guard and Transport Security Administration (TSA) act as integral partners during the response efforts for a disaster. Separating DHS from FEMA would result in this coordination with the creation of bureaucratic barriers to the sharing of information. DHS has worked under nine major reorganizations since its origin. A decreased morale is observed with these reorganizations, having confused the employees and stakeholders about the mission of DHS, its responsibilities and roles. By taking FEMA out of the DHS would mean reorganizing DHS again which would increase the number of confused stakeholders and employees. Reorganizations in the future must be taken seriously, taking precautionary measures and taking the reaction of employees and stakeholders in consideration.

The past few decades have observed an exponential increase in the federalization of the disaster response. The growth has been seen in the higher number of the federal disaster declarations, with a number following a continual increase each year. The federalization of the disaster encourages the local and state governments for being lesser prepared while a disaster strikes as they have known that there will be intervention by the government. This is not good for the disaster victims but also come at the significant expense to the taxpayers, forcing to subsidize the response efforts. There is a better approach which corresponds to encouraging the local and state government for developing its capabilities. From the cabinet level, a more massive FEMA bureaucracy would be sending an exact contradictory message that more federal resources would be brought by the White House to the local and state governments.

While a failure of FEMA has been mentioned due to its response against Hurricane Katrina, stating that DHS inevitably requires some reorganization, the reality is that DHS has taken lessons from the hurricane Katrina by making changes at the departmental level (Sapat, Li, Mitchell, & Esnard, 2011). Such changes have been leading to tremendous improvement in the federal disaster response capabilities. FEMA has shown its worth during several other disasters faced by the U.S. by providing an early response with the collaboration which is cross-governmental with the local and state actors, with improvement in staffing and technology.

# Conclusion

Instead of the reorganization of DHS, the Congress and the DHS must focus on the reformation of the congressional oversight of the homeland security. There are different committees and subcommittees having the jurisdiction over such issues. The DHS has been overworked for responding to the demands of the Congress, leaving congress unfocussed and being unable to give the quality oversight. DHS, on the other hand, must focus on improving the response by considering the examples with encouraging local and state governments for increasing their capabilities. The scales used for the analysis of a disaster must be taken into consideration while aligning the emergency declarations, e.g., Richter scale. Along with this, as a disaster crosses the defined level of local and state capabilities, FEMA must be there to intervene. This ensures that FEMA's resources are dedicated to those who require the response on the national level. If FEMA is taken out of the DHS, the progress which has been accomplished since 9/11 would be demolished. A united and robust DHS must be supported by America. Keeping the major components within the ranks helps in accomplishment of this task.

References

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