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Homeland Security Mobilization Requires Greater Coordination

by NDIA Staff

(This article was adapted from a paper, titled, "Mobilization for Homeland Security: Preparedness, Response and Recovery," written by members of the 2002 class of the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, National Defense University)

A combined, interagency effort between military, government, non-government and business emergency-response resources is necessary for the United States to be able to react to and recover from a terrorist attack with weapons of mass destruction.

These agencies should work together to identify vulnerabilities, develop robust emergency-management plans based on an all-hazards approach, conduct training and exercises, educate first-responders and public officials, facilitate intelligence sharing between agencies, improve public health monitoring and surveillance systems, expand medical surge capacity, evaluate available stocks of pharmaceuticals, improve communication systems, mandate interoperable communications and develop or fortify mutual aid agreements within metropolitan regions and with neighboring states.

The use of weapons of mass destruction is not a new trend, by any means. In 429 B.C., the Spartans ignited pitch and sulfur to create toxic fumes in the Peloponnesian War. In 1456, the city of Belgrade defeated invading Turks by igniting rags dipped in poison to create a toxic cloud. In 1710, Russian troops used plague-infected corpses against Swedes. Several countries used WMD during World Wars I and II.

From the 1940s to the early 1990s, "duck and cover" exercises and fallout shelters represented our domestic preparation for a possible Soviet nuclear attack. The WMD of the Cold War were considered weapons of last resort.

During the past decade, globalization, the explosion of knowledge, exponential expansion of technology and ever-growing distance between the "have" and "have-nots" provide rogue states and terrorists with ways, means and reasons to employ WMD terrorism.

Our seemingly uncivilized foreign and domestic opponents have proven themselves quite resourceful and knowledgeable. They understand our vulnerabilities and strengths, the relationship between psychological and physical aspects of war and the art of indirect and direct targeting. Our most evasive, irrational, and dangerous adversaries are very likely transnational terrorists.

Although WMD terrorism, per se, has not been prevalent in the United States, the Federal Bureau of Investigation considers the possible use of biological toxins and industrial chemicals as most threatening.

The mobilization role of the federal government, essentially, is to assist and support state governments, coordinate and communicate with foreign governments and support public will.

The bulk of federal plans regarding continuity of government are classified. Yet framework documents laying out key strategies have long been in the public domain. That those plans are being put to use in the post-September 11 environment should have come as no surprise. What remains unclear is how classified continuity-of-government plans have been modified from their original Cold War purpose of surviving a Soviet nuclear strike and mobilizing for retaliation.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the executive agent for continuity-of-government activities, and within FEMA, this task is the responsibility of the Office of National Security Affairs. FEMA's Federal Preparedness Circular 65 of July 26, 1999, establishes three phases: activation and relocation (0-12 hours), alternative facility operations (12 hours-termination) and reconstitution (termination and return to normal operations).

Many state and local jurisdictions, some of which have constitutions, have detailed continuity-of-government plans. But evidence suggests they have not fully considered the potential assistance that U.S. armed forces can provide, especially during the early phases.

Much can be learned from the Federal Reserve Bank's brilliant management of post-September 11 financial stabilization efforts. The association between the speed of U.S. financial stabilization and our ability to create new international coalitions should not be underestimated. We could well have a number of "fair weather friends" abroad whose loyalty might shift if the U.S. economy was severely disrupted by a well-coordinated WMD attack.

The success of post-attack stabilization depends on redundancy of data systems and sufficient market decentralization to limit the effects of WMD attacks on the financial system. The financial community has done much to reduce vulnerability, but shortcomings remain. For example, the location of the New York Stock Exchange—not only is it a large and centralized physical target, it is an even larger psychological one.

Many non-WMD related preparedness, response, and recovery themes apply to possible terrorist WMD scenarios. We don't have to "re-invent the wheel" in many respects.

Concept of Operations Plan

The January 2001 U.S. government interagency domestic terrorism concept of operations plan (CONPLAN) provides the overall guidance to federal, state and local agencies concerning how the federal government responds to potential or actual terrorist threats or incidents. This CONPLAN establishes the FBI as the lead agency for crisis management and FEMA for consequence management.

The CONPLAN charges the FBI with identifying, acquiring and planning the use of resources, and with anticipating, preventing, and/or resolving a threat or act of terrorism through law enforcement means. FEMA's role is intended to protect public health and safety, restore essential government services and provide emergency relief to government, businesses and individuals affected by the consequences of terrorism, using structures and resources of the Federal Response Plan. In April 1999, the FBI and FEMA reinforced this relationship by adding a Terrorism Incident Annex to the FRP to ensure that adequate domestic WMD terrorism response plans are available.

U.S. laws assign primary WMD incident-response authority to the state and local governments while the federal government provides assistance. Our research suggests that the U.S. government has instituted effective ways and means to ensure "horizontal" synchronization of federal response actions for WMD terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland. However, the effectiveness of "vertical" synchronization of operations among the federal, state and local departments and agencies remains questionable.

Two initiatives have, however, provided critical first steps in overcoming this obstacle—the creation of the Office of National Preparedness (ONP) and the 2003 Presidential Budget proposal.

In May 2001, President Bush asked the FEMA director to create the ONP. He recognized that numerous federal departments and agencies had programs to deal with consequences of WMD use in the U.S. and several planned and provided various forms of training and assistance to state and local governments.

However, funding constraints postponed the planned summer 2001 creation of the ONP. A few months later, the 11 September attacks provided the stimulus for finally establishing this office, in January 2002.

The second initiative, the president's 2003 budget proposal, highlights the increased need for additional synchronization of federal, state and local first responder actions. It also requests an increase to FEMA funding, for more effective FEMA coordination with the White House Office of Homeland Security to ensure the CONPLAN and other agency plans are synchronized and integrated to equip, train and exercise for possible WMD terrorism acts.

The creation of the ONP and increased funding for national-level integration and synchronization provide a strong foundation for effective and efficient national mobilization to meet national disaster requirements.

However, we recommend that Congress provide earmarked funding to conduct vertically synchronized semi-annual preparedness validation exercises. Money requested by the president's budget uses the word "may" to denote funding for such exercise preparedness. We believe Congress should allocate funding for FEMA and state governments to participate in multi-level, governor-initiated WMD terrorist attack exercises. These exercises should stress all aspects of response and recovery plans, and provide the means to validate and improve plans using current intelligence information.

When a WMD incident occurs, first responders—who include police officers, firefighters, emergency service personnel, and medical specialists—are responsible for saving lives, limiting casualties, protecting property and securing possible evidence for the FBI. The on-scene commander, typically a sheriff, police chief or fire department captain, provides initial direction of the overall effort. Generally, he assesses the situation and requests support through the county executive, who in turn contacts the state governor. The governor informs the FEMA regional director of the incident, declares the disaster and requests assistance from the president. If necessary, the state governor can direct the activation of the National Guard.

A limiting factor among first responders has been a lack of resources, namely funding for equipment, training and exercises. President Bush's proposed increasing the homeland security annual budget (for 2003) by 93 percent and the first-responder budget by 1,000 percent. But in addition to sufficient funding, collaboration and synchronization at the federal, state and local levels are necessary.

A domestic WMD incident can reasonably be expected to exceed state and local capabilities and require a Defense Department response. Under the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici Domestic Preparedness Program, the Pentagon has provided training, equipment and assistance in developing local emergency action plans to 150 of our larger cities. The Army National Guard's homeland security units are the WMD Civil Support Teams. They are required to assess suspected WMD events in support of the on-scene commander, advise civilian responders and facilitate, and expedite arrival of additional military personnel.

These teams, based in 27 states, are equipped with high-end detection, analytical, and protective equipment. They possess satellite, secure and cellular telephone communications to provide connectivity with both civil and military forces.

Nonetheless, in a multiple-location, simultaneous attack scenario, the United States has insufficient capability to deter or detect biological attacks. Substantially more than 44 Civil Support Teams may be required. Capabilities for timely identification, effective treatment protocols, mass casualty care and containment and decontamination procedures are known shortfalls.

The Defense Department also needs to produce a concise doctrine for WMD CSTs and coordinate this with the Joint Staff. Doctrine needs to clearly define the roles, missions, employment concepts and expected capabilities for these teams. For example, National Guard units could be supported with unmanned aerial

vehicles capable of detecting and possibly neutralizing WMD agents and assessing damage.

The equipment used by WMD incident responders needs to be standardized or interoperable throughout the response community. It should be interchangeable and meet both military and civilian regulation standards unilaterally. All agencies, federal through local, need to standardize training to minimize difficulty when operating in concert when faced with a common emergency.

A timely response to a domestic WMD event and the limitations on U.S. personnel and equipment drive the need to foster collaborative WMD response capabilities with other nations—especially our neighbors, Canada and Mexico. Several organizations are postured to render disaster relief, specifically the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and non-governmental organizations, but most prominently, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

NATO coordinates planning in several areas of civil activity, most notably medical matters and civil protection. NATO's focus point for the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Capability is the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EADRCC). The main function of the EADRCC is to coordinate the response to a disaster occurring within the Euro-Atlantic geographical area.

NATO does not wish to duplicate actions of other international organizations. Rather, NATO's role is to act when requested as a medium for information sharing and cooperation among NATO member countries and to provide disaster assistance where NATO resources are available. For the process to work as envisioned, bilateral support arrangements need to be updated and improved in cooperation between civil and military authorities including host-nation support and reinforcement planning.

The stricken country remains the responsible party for disaster management and the UN retains the primary role in the coordination of international disaster-relief operations. In the case of a disaster requiring international assistance, individual nations must decide whether to provide assistance and, if so, whether to do so through the Euro-Atlantic disaster response agency or by providing assistance directly to the stricken country.

Historically, the United States has been apt to assist other countries while insisting on self-sufficiency when faced with similar dilemmas—appearing to be too proud to accept assistance. Existing UN and NATO agreements, virtually untapped by the United States for its own mobilization benefit, can be a cost-effective means of generating international assistance to prepare for, respond to and recover from WMD incidents.

During World Wars I and II, U.S. mobilization was the deciding factor in the outcome of both wars. Why shouldn't the United States realistically approach the WMD terrorism issue by humbling itself to the benefits of collaboration? Currently, the State Department's Office of Counterterrorism is providing training to "have not" nations—those without existing WMD response capabilities.

The Political-Military Bureau is working at developing a web of regional responders from the "have" nations already possessing WMD response assets. Why can't this same philosophy be shared among "have" nations? It would be prudent for the U.S. government to review and determine how it can benefit from existing arrangements. Where there are voids to effective mobilization efforts, we should strive for bilateral agreements, especially with NATO countries.

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The paper received the 2002 NDIA award for "excellence in defense mobilization research." It was selected by the faculty of ICAF's Grand Strategy Mobilization Department. The complete, unedited version of the paper can be found on www.ndia.org.

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