

# **Weapons of Mass Destruction, Terrorism, and U.S. Preparedness**

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to the Subcommittee on National Security, International Affairs, and Criminal Justice of the U.S.  
House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight

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Mr. Chairman and Subcommittee Members, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss weapons of mass destruction (WMD) terrorism and U.S. preparedness. I am especially grateful given the role played by CSIS and the Transnational Threats Initiative in helping formulate the issues eventually taken up in the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici (NLD) legislation.

I would like to first make a few comments regarding the current state of the threat, recent U.S. initiatives with respect to domestic preparedness, and the findings and recommendations of the General Accounting Office (GAO) report on threat and risk assessments. I would also like to offer some observations and recommendations aimed at enhancing our government-wide capabilities to plan for, respond to, and manage the consequences of WMD terrorism.

Regarding the threat, there has been a great deal of discussion on the "changing face" of terrorism and the impact of advanced technology on terrorists' ways of doing business.

Without elaborating on the specificities of weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, radiological, biological, and chemical), which are very different from one another and pose extraordinary challenges, they do share certain commonalities. Terrorism is multifaceted and differs from group to group and incident to incident. Yet the single common denominator is that it is a psychological weapon, intended to erode trust and undermine confidence in our government, its elected officials, institutions or policies. What makes a WMD terrorist incident unique is that it can be a transforming event. A terrorist attack involving weapons of mass destruction would have catastrophic effects on American society beyond the deaths it might cause. While the probability of a major WMD attack may be low in the near future, the consequences are too severe to ignore. Aside from the actual physical effects and human suffering resulting from a WMD event, the psychological impact would be enormous, shaking the nation's trust and confidence in its government to its core.

To fully appreciate the considerable challenges we are facing, it is important to put the current fears regarding the threat into perspective. For decades, terrorism experts have

argued the likelihood of a major terrorist incident occurring on U.S. soil. They also argued over the possibility of terrorists using weapons of mass destruction. The debating ended abruptly with the February 26, 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the May 20, 1995<sup>1</sup> sarin gas attack of the Tokyo subway. Threat calibrations did a 180-degree turn, and our nation's planners have been running ever since to catch up with the change and back-fill shortfalls that had been allowed to grow during the debating years.

Recognition that acts (possibly involving weapons of mass destruction) can indeed occur in America has been a cornerstone of both the Congress' and the Clinton Administration's national security agendas in recent years.

This acknowledgment has triggered a number of initiatives including: the issuance of Presidential Decision Directive 39, updating our national policy in countering terrorism signed by President Clinton in 1995; the promulgation of Public Laws 104-201, the Defense Against Weapons of Mass Destruction Act and 104-132, the Anti-Terrorism Act in 1996; the "Gore Commission" on Airline and Airport Security; and the recent promulgation of Presidential Decision Directives 62 and 63 on weapons of mass destruction terrorism and critical infrastructure protection and cyberterrorism. WMD terrorism has also figured prominently in every major recent Department of Defense study (e.g. the Quadrennial Defense Review, the Defense Science Board Summer Study on Transnational Threats, and the National Defense Panel Report).

Regarding the GAO report, *Combating Terrorism: Threat and Risk Assessments Can Help Prioritize and Target Program Investments*, I fully endorse conducting threat and risk assessments and prioritizing countermeasures to mitigate vulnerabilities and manage risk. While I recognize the need for processes to best allocate finite resources, however, I do not believe that it is an effective mechanism for selecting which cities qualify to receive NLD-legislated training and equipment and when--based on the likelihood of an attack.

Firstly, this approach is subjective and contingent upon threat intelligence which is a "moving target." Secondly, the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City and the recent near simultaneous bombings of the U.S. embassies in East Africa are clear reminders that terrorists may strike when and where we least expect them to. By its very nature, terrorism inherently extends the battlefield to incorporate all of society and terrorists often take the path of least resistance. Furthermore, this approach merely displaces risk, and forces the terrorist, who is often flexible, to select a "softer" target, in this case a city which did not receive the needed training and equipment.

For these reasons, I think we must work toward achieving a nationwide baseline of common policies, plans and procedures and resources--irrespective of resource rich or resource poor environments. New York City, for example, has recognized the threat and has demonstrated the urgency and leadership needed to accomplish what must get done--even at a cost politically. They took matters into their own hands. The same cannot be said, however, of other major metropolitan cities. I was taken, by the way, with the remark made by the FBI in its comments on the report that "even the best prepared cities

do not always have the inherent capability to manage the potential magnitude of a WMD incident."

In order to prioritize and allocate resources and assets, a better approach in my eyes, might be to: (1) require each of the 120 cities originally selected for the NLD program to develop their own emergency response plans, including initial assessments aimed at identifying capability gaps and resources shortfalls; (2) have the plans evaluated by the Department of Defense and other entities, e.g., the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) and Department of Justice; (3) undertake training and exercising; (4) review lessons learned from the exercises; and (5) loan equipment commensurate with the needs identified from the exercise. One cannot overstate the enormous value of training and exercising. Such activities not only go a long way in fostering a culture of cooperation but also allow us to make the big mistakes on the practice-field as opposed to the battlefield or on "Main Street, USA."

This now leads me into my observations and recommendations regarding consequence management.

Our program here at CSIS has, I hope, been helpful in raising awareness and identifying strategic and tactical gaps and shortfalls. Over the past few years we have produced a number of reports, some of which you are familiar with, and an interagency WMD simulation. Our resulting laundry list for preparedness is quite long and expensive and continues to grow. It includes, among other things, accelerated training; gaming and exercising; development and fielding of technology to detect, identify, and contain chemical and biological agents; epidemiological enhancements (unfortunately, with respect to biologicals, the "silent killers," the first indication may be falling bodies--as symptoms may take days or even weeks to manifest themselves); and improved intelligence sharing between agencies at the federal level and timely dissemination to state and local officials. It also includes leveraging advances in the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries and providing them with incentives to research, develop and produce vaccines, antidotes, and antibiotics that would ultimately be stockpiled.

A central theme of the NLD legislation was that detecting and preventing the use of weapons of mass destruction is not always possible. No matter how robust our intelligence gathering capabilities may be, it simply will not be able to provide early warning of all WMD terrorist attempts. NLD also appreciated the role of the first responders and that WMD terrorism and emergency preparedness cannot only be addressed at the national level, from the top down, but must also be viewed from the bottom-up. From the eyes of the local first responders, our first line of defense--these are the men and women who will ultimately decide whether the battle is either won or lost. There are some true pockets of excellence at the national level, such as the Marine Corps' Chemical and Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF), the Army's Technical Escort Unit and the Department of Energy's Nuclear Emergency Search Team (NEST), which are extremely valuable when pre-positioned at fixed-site events--as they were during the Atlanta Olympics. Unfortunately, their value falls off precipitously in a no-notice terrorist attack. That this is so is not surprising given the lengthy lead-time required to deploy to

the site of the event. In an extremely compressed window of opportunity for administering first aid, identifying the agent, administering life-saving antidotes after a chemical or biological event--the so-called golden hour or minutes, federal assets would likely arrive after the last viable victim had been removed from the scene.

In light of these shortcomings, it may turn out that the passage of the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici legislation served as a marker in the sand. In retrospect, one can look back and see that the legislation represents a truly historical milestone in national security. Not surprisingly, the legislation has subsequently spawned a number of valuable initiatives and programs, including the Defense Preparedness Program; The NDMS Metropolitan Medical Strike Teams; the Department of Justice State and Local Domestic Preparedness Equipment Support Program; the National Guard and Reserve Rapid Assessment and Initial Detection Teams.

I would like to leave with you two recommendations for your consideration. The first deals with designating a Commander-in-Chief for "homeland defense" (CINCUSA) and the second with a new federally funded research and development center.

In order to institute a more systematic and integrative approach to protecting the Continental United States from threats such as WMD terrorism, critical infrastructure protection and missile defense, it may be worthwhile to create a new Commander-in-Chief (CINC) USA. The CINCUSA would be responsible for all Department of Defense related strategies and activities related to homeland defense issues and would serve as a focal point and facilitate coordination within the department of defense and between the many federal, state and local law enforcement, intelligence and medical communities with related responsibilities. It also designates a single budget, accountability and access to forces (across services).

Of all WMD terrorist threats, the U.S. is arguably least prepared for and most vulnerable to terrorism involving biological weapons. In order to leverage advances in the commercial biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and medical communities it may be worth considering establishing a federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) wholly dedicated to sustaining R&D efforts aimed at preventing and protecting the U.S. against biological threats. Such R&D programs could include accelerated sensor development (to provide detection and identification of biological agents), and producing antidotes and vaccines.

I would like to close with some words of caution. At this time next year, the funds for the Defense Preparedness Program run out. I think it is imperative that Congress recognize the importance of this program and the spirit of the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici legislation. The keys to success are continued leadership as a policy priority and sustained funding through the outyears to ensure that all agencies local, state, regional and federal, are sufficiently equipped, trained, exercised, and prepared to respond effectively to a WMD terrorist event. This requires long-term capital investment strategies, which project into the future. We simply cannot afford to wait "until they are coming over the hill," to embark on an upgrade program. Nothing less than a seamless integration of such efforts

must be achieved. This requires re-examining how we as a nation perceive national security and in making sure that all of the proper parties have a seat at the policy planning table.

Given the Department of Defense's experience, expertise, capabilities and resources, I would suggest that its mandate be extended beyond FY 1999, as initially required by the Defense Authorization Bill and that it remain the Executive Agent.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions you may have.

<sup>1</sup> The Aum Shinrikyo first carried out a nerve gas attack in Matsumoto killing four and injuring over 100 in June, 1994 unbeknownst to western diplomatic and intelligence services at the time.