

Homeland Security Challenges for the 21st Century

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, evoked with stunning clarity the face and intent of enemies very different from those the nation has faced before—terrorists such as al Qaeda, willing and able to attack us in our territory using tactics designed to take advantage of our relatively open society and individual freedoms. In the 3 years since the attacks, the nation has begun confronting the enemy abroad and domestically at the federal, state, local, and private levels. For example, the Congress enacted legislation creating the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and strengthening other security measures in law enforcement and border and transportation security. Military action destroyed many terrorist sanctuaries and support networks. The new Northern Command provided additional resources and authority for homeland defense. Law enforcement disrupted terrorist cells and worked with international authorities to identify and disrupt other terrorist threats and target terrorist financing. National strategies, such as the National Strategy for Homeland Security, set initiatives in many homeland security areas. A series of homeland security presidential decision directives provided further guidance and objectives in areas such as critical infrastructure protection, national warning systems, and national preparedness goals and metrics.

However, the threat of terrorism will persist well into the 21st century. Terrorists are dispersed in loosely organized, self-financed, international networks of terrorists, some of which are cross-national. Domestic terrorist groups remain a security threat, though currently to a much lesser extent than the international terrorist movement. We must fundamentally reexamine our approaches to terrorism and homeland security—the nature of the terrorist threat, its long-term impact, and the impact of our strategies. While most believe we are safer than we were on the day of the September 11 attacks, we still are not safe.

The following challenges and illustrative questions provide a framework for thinking about these issues in the future.

Defining an acceptable, achievable (within constrained budgets) level of risk is an imperative to address current and future threats. Many have pointed out, as did the Gilmore and 9/11 Commissions,

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that the nation will never be completely safe and total security is an unachievable goal. Risks have been exposed in many aspects of normal life, with perhaps many of the greatest dangers posed in areas that Americans have simply taken for granted, such as air and water supplies, food production chains, information systems, airports and train stations, ports, borders, and shopping malls. However, we cannot afford to protect everything against all threats—choices must be made about protection priorities given the risk and how to best allocate available resources. While risk-based allocation decision-making is still evolving, we must take a more systematic, reasonable approach to allocating resources. Adoption of management system standards, such as the National Fire Protection Association 1600 standard for national preparedness, can also aid in assessing risk and defining key homeland security activities.

► *What is an acceptable level of risk to guide homeland security strategies and investments, particularly federal funding? For example, how should risk be managed in making sound threat, risk, and criticality assessments, developing countermeasure options, and implementing those options considered the most effective and the most efficient? What criteria should be used to target federal funding for homeland security in order to maximize results and mitigate risk within available resource levels?*

Confronting asymmetric threats requires new international and domestic strategies and related tactics on our part. International and domestic terrorists will not be defeated by conventional force projection and weapons systems, law enforcement, or infrastructure protection alone. Instead, our tactics will hinge more on intelligence, diplomatic efforts, and domestic partnerships across many actors. Understanding the underlying causes of terrorism—the isolation and alienation that feeds violence—and focusing on mitigating those causes is likely to be the only way to truly diminish the levels of terrorism globally and domestically. For example, the international terrorist movement draws on a hatred of what is seen as the corrupting influences of western culture and values. Instigators of terrorism can find recruits for violent actions among those who see themselves with little or nothing to lose. Thus, efforts to confront ideological differences and offer hope for the

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future are essential to the long-term effectiveness of combating terrorism. Public diplomacy will be challenged to target and better reach audiences in areas where new threats are emerging.

▶ *What new international and domestic strategies and related tactics will effectively confront the asymmetric tactics we now face and, for the longer term, address the root causes of terrorism? For example, how can we best anticipate, and thus counter, asymmetric threats such as suicide attacks, biological and chemical terrorism, and cyber attacks? What approaches will address the root causes of terrorism, whether from domestic or international groups? For example, should the current U.S. approach to overseas broadcasting be realigned to target and better reach audiences in areas where new threats are?*

Establishing effective federal, state, and local government; private sector; nongovernmental; and nation-state partnerships is crucial to addressing risk across the nation. The Constitution requires the federal government to “provide for the common defense” and to “repel invasions.” Many would interpret those requirements to justify homeland security and related counterterrorism activities as an inherently governmental obligation. However, the vast majority of the targets that require protection are those owned by the private sector—critical infrastructure such as water and power sources and information systems. Many of the emergency response and recovery capabilities are those with nonfederal or not-for-profit entities, such as public health facilities.

▶ *Are existing incentives sufficient to support private sector protection of critical infrastructure it owns, and what changes might be necessary? How can intelligence and information on threats be shared with other levels of government and other critical entities, yet be held secure?*

Measuring progress in the current war on terrorism is very much a work in progress. Measures in use—such as the number of terrorists detained or arrested worldwide or kept on the run—may be extremely limited or meaningless without knowing if such actions seriously destroy, degrade, or disrupt terrorists’ plans or seriously degrade or dissuade their recruitment efforts and community support. The apparent lack of international terrorist attacks within our borders since the September 2001 attacks suggests positive

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results from our homeland security actions, but it may also simply reflect terrorist choice of the time and place of another attack. Small-scale domestic terrorist attacks still occur. Fully addressing the range of threats posed by terrorism and its causes requires more sophisticated ways to gauge progress.

► *What is the most viable way to approach homeland security results management and accountability? For example, how should progress in the current war on terrorism be measured and assessed? What are the appropriate goals for prevention, vulnerability reduction, and response and recovery? Who is accountable for the many components of homeland security when many partners and functions and disciplines are involved? How can these actors be held accountable and by whom?*

Traditionally, state and local governments have had the primary responsibility for financing first responders' preparation for and response to disasters, whether natural or manmade, which are generally local in their cause and effect. Prior to September 11, 2001, the federal government's role was limited primarily to providing guidance, some grants for planning, mitigation, and equipment, and disaster response and recovery assistance after such major disasters as hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods. Since September 11, 2001, the federal government has provided billions of dollars to state and local governments for planning, equipment, and training to enhance the capabilities of first responders to respond to both smaller scale natural disasters and terrorist attacks. However, the federal financial assistance provided in the last several years has not been guided by a clear risk-based strategic plan that outlines the role of federal, state, and local governments in identifying, enhancing, maintaining, and financing critical first responder capabilities for emergencies. Moreover, while planning and assistance has largely been focused on single jurisdictions and their immediately adjacent neighbors, well-documented problems with first responders from multiple organizations to communicate at the site of an incident and the potential for large scale terrorist incidents have generated a debate on the extent to which first responders should be focusing their planning and preparation on a regional and multi-governmental basis. In addition, no standards have been established on which to determine the equipment, skills,

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and capacities that first responders need given the risks individual locations may face. In the absence of risk-based performance standards that could be used to establish baseline capabilities and critical capacities, state and local governments have used their own criteria for determining how federal grant funds should be spent. The absence of standards has also made it difficult for first responders to define the gap between what is and what should be and measure their progress in achieving defined performance goals.

- ▶ *What should be the role of federal, state, and local governments in identifying risks—from nature or man—in individual states and localities and establishing standards for the equipment, skills, and capacities that first responders need?*
- ▶ *What costs should be borne by federal, state, and local governments or the private sector in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters large and small—whether the acts of nature or man, accidental or deliberate?*
- ▶ *To what extent and how should the federal government encourage and foster a role for regional or multistate entities in emergency planning and response?*