

## The Development of Homeland Defense: A New National Imperative

A report on three regional seminar workshops on Homeland Defense held in Denver, Colorado, and sponsored by the Denver Council on Foreign Relations and the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, Rocky Mountain Region.

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## **Executive Summary**

- The definition of Homeland Defense (HD) arrived at by participants in the Denver meetings is as follows: Homeland Defense encompasses conventional and non-conventional actions by individual terrorists and national states against traditional and nontraditional targets and merits unprecedented public and private cooperation.
- The federal government alone cannot defend the American homeland. It requires, rather, a combination of federal, state, local and private sources, as well as cooperation with international law enforcement and anti-terrorist officials. The greatest barrier in this regard is the lack of sharing between the FBI, CIA, police, medical professionals and other sources about information regarding threats to national security. To be effective, information must be shared and available to all persons with Homeland Defense responsibilities.
- Biological, Chemical, Radiological and Conventional (e.g., explosives) Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), along with Cyber Warfare, comprise the threats that Homeland Defense is primarily aimed at addressing. Attendees agreed that these threats posed a greater risk to the American people and the American homeland than traditional conventional and nuclear attacks - missiles may be the worst way to try and attack the US, while the best weapon may be a Ford pickup truck or a sailboat on the Potomac river.
- In regard to targets of attack, an attacker can take out key centers of energy or transportation without inflicting large casualties, so perhaps numbers of casualties should not be the sole guide for US counter-terrorist and Homeland Defense efforts.
- Any master US Homeland Defense program would have to be orchestrated in such a way as to protect individual civil liberties and state and local freedoms.

## **Introduction: The Threat to the American Homeland**

Homeland Defense is a relatively new concept, a term used only in the last two and a half years with any regularity. The term was used in the recent Heart-Rudman report, which said that the US homeland was now vulnerable (report available at [www.nscg.gov](http://www.nscg.gov)), and concluded that the two most serious threats to the US were cyber and biological attacks. The 1999 Columbine shootings may have been the catalyst that defined the intolerable, that pushed the talk of the need for HD or some higher level of defense against major threats to the public. During the Cold War the US did not practice Homeland Defense, but relied primarily on Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) as its doctrine of nuclear deterrence against attacks on the American homeland. Given that it was bordered by “friendlies” Mexico and Canada, defending the homeland at that time was left primarily to the military under the doctrine of MAD, as nuclear attack or conventional bombardment were considered the most likely means of attack on the homeland. Seminar workshop participants agreed that MAD is not effective against the likes of Osama Bin Laden today, however, and so a new doctrine of defense of the homeland is needed. Senator Sam Nunn has said the chance of a particular American city suffering a biological or chemical attack is quite remote, but the chances that one of America’s cities will be hit by such an attack in the next ten years is quite high. Capabilities for this kind of attack have changed in recent years, making them much more difficult to thwart and to

address once they have occurred. One expert participant noted that if one knows what one is doing, one can make anthrax for as little as \$10,000. Some analysts noted that if kids can create some of these chemicals - what of a thousand trained scientists in a hostile country working daily on a way to attack the US?

Consider three recent terrorist attacks. While the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York several years ago was quite shocking, it was nowhere near what its perpetrator, Achmed Ramsey Youssef, had planned. His plan was to kill 250,000 people by blowing up the one tower so it would fall into the other tower, thus collapsing both. Osama Bin Laden has openly said he wants to kill American citizens and is trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction. The leader of the Japanese Aum Shinruko sect had planned many attacks on Japan and the United States, but was prevented from doing so after his capture following his serin gas attack in the Tokyo subway.

Many US enemies feel they can't defeat the US military directly and so they look for other ways to get at the US. This opens up the potential for acts of war against any US citizen anywhere. Such attacks are called asymmetrical warfare. In the past, hostiles had to cross the US military to get at American citizens. With late technological advances this is no longer the case, however, hence the need for a Homeland Defense system that involves more than the US military.

In the law enforcement community the issue boils down to how best to keep the people and facilities in the area of their jurisdiction safe - it does not really have a national or even regional dimension. Consequently, communication may be the worst problem for law enforcement officials in the event of a large scale disaster or attack. Law enforcement officials are all on different frequencies, literally, and local police usually don't have clearance to get national security information. Recently, however, the FBI has been making initiatives to make this kind of information available. Though there is some progress here, participants agreed more is needed.

Should a biological attack occur, expert participants concurred that there is not enough vaccines/antidotes/antibiotics in the US to guard a metropolitan area the size of Denver. Those on hand presently couldn't even protect Frederick, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, with its 100,000 people. This is true even assuming that the symptoms were discovered and diagnosed early enough to treat victims. Anthrax, for example, is a highly problematic chemical - the symptoms don't surface until days after exposure, when it is already too late and thousands have already been exposed. Some agents like smallpox are replicating - highly contagious. This would be yet a different situation - a pandemic whose origins would be very difficult to trace. In situations such as these the military, national guard and police, traditionally thought of as being the key players in defending the American people against attacks, don't have such a large role to play - the medical establishment becomes the front line in such cases. Yet most medical professionals aren't trained to recognize the effects of chemical agents, and would likely diagnose initial cases as conventional illnesses. Moreover, it is likely that all of those involved in responding to a chemical or biological attack in the first 24 hours when the problem is being identified will die because they will be exposed unknowingly, further

deepening the crisis. Only when deaths become widespread would it be likely that chemical and biological agents experts might be called in to analyze the cases. By then, however, the problem would likely be too far along to be treatable for scores of victims.

The Denver meetings were a follow up in the American Heartland to a similar meeting held at the National War College in January, 2000. Those who attended both the Washington and Denver meetings agreed that there was general consensus between attendees of both meetings that this is a very serious issue for the United States, one that needs to be addressed at all levels, local, state, and federal. Yet there were some differences between the Washington and Denver discussions. In Denver the discussion turned immediately to the citizen role in Homeland Defense, whereas in Washington the focus was on the roles of federal agents. In Denver there were more questions about Washington's ability to deal with attacks on the homeland, whereas in DC the participants had more faith in the federal government's ability to counter/deal with such problems. In Denver the discussion expressed a greater need for local inputs to national intelligence. For example, local persons might identify a threat people in Washington might not be aware of. This is especially likely in the case of lone-wolf-type domestic terrorists. In Denver participants discussed the possible need for a Homeland Defense chief in the metropolitan area to coordinate actions of police and other agencies. The Denver group also discussed the possibility of trying to build a model locally for dealing with HD threats, especially the need to resolve problems of coordination and communication. Striking about both the Washington and Denver meetings was the absence of us/them dichotomies (i.e., state/local vs. Feds) - participants at both meetings agreed on the need for coordination between federal and state and local actors in the public and private sectors.

### **Defining Homeland Defense**

The definition of Homeland Defense (HD), agreed upon by participants at the Denver meetings, is as follows: Homeland Defense encompasses conventional and non-conventional actions by individual terrorists and national states against traditional and nontraditional targets and merits unprecedented public and private cooperation. It is a subset of national security, but is directed at non-traditional security threats - different means and targets - and by nature requires cooperation and coordination between federal, state and local authorities and medical professionals.

In the discussion of HD, the consensus of participants was that HD should be conceived of as attacks inside the 50 states largely from the outside, though there is a question mark as to whether to include domestic terrorists such as Timothy McVeigh. One important question raised at the meetings was, are these Defense Department issues or Department of Justice issues? Is there really a distinction between HD and national security writ large? Is 5000 people dying in a building a threat to national security, or is it a tragedy? If the latter, is it really a part of HD, which we've considered to be a subset of national security? Participants seemed to agree that HD should be considered a subset of national security, but one that entailed coordination between local, state, federal and international

actors, which blurred the lines between the Timothy McVeighs and the Osama Bin Ladens.

Another point made by participants was that since “the bad guys” are on both sides of our borders, HD must also entail coordination with authorities in other countries, truly making it an issue that requires coordination at all levels, from local to international.

### **The Means by which the Homeland is Threatened**

Participants in the seminar workshops agreed that threats to the homeland could come by a number of different means, the most common of which are the following.

- Biological Warfare (e.g., releasing viruses or diseases into a population)
- Chemical Warfare (e.g., releasing harmful chemical agents into air or water supplies)
- Cyber Warfare (e.g., computer hacking, disabling information systems)
- Radiological Warfare (e.g., releasing uranium or plutonium into water supplies, etc.)
- Conventional Weapons of Mass Destruction (e.g., explosives, etc.)

Regarding the sources of such attacks, state actors are one source of threat to the homeland. Iran, Iraq and North Korea have been considered potential threats. Non-state actors are also a threat, whether individuals such as McVeigh-type domestic terrorists and Osama Bin Laden-type foreign terrorists, or groups like the Irish Republican Army or Hezbollah. Cyber-hackers might be another form, as was evident in both the US and China after the April 1, 2001, spyplane incident. Attacks today are not necessarily limited to military targets, but are likely to target civilians or corporations as well. These targets may not be critical infrastructure as commonly defined, but their being hit could have an enormous, adverse effect on millions of Americans. For example, the Love Virus, developed by a young Filipino, caused 2 billion dollars worth of damage worldwide in 2000. Yet despite the similarity in outcome, participants agreed that there is a great difference between some kids who decide to destroy X facility and a terrorist group that has a long term political agenda and will strike again if they are foiled at X facility.

### **Defining the Defenders**

So who are the players and what are the roles needed to defend the US today and in the future? The Rudman-Heart analysis, and most other discussions on defense in Washington, discuss HD and terrorism. Yet these meetings’ participants asked do officials in Washington consider the Washington-Boston corridor as the only area needful of defense? The problem, they argue, is a national one - for these issues reach every small town in the US.

Participants of the Denver seminar workshops generally agreed that the following institutions, agencies and organizations are the primary bearers of responsibility as it regards Homeland Defense, though their relative importance is by no means reflected in the order in which they appear below.

- The federal government and its agencies, including the FBI and CIA

- The US military
- The National Guard in all locales
- Members of the federal, state and local law enforcement communities
- The INS - because it involves border security
- Officials of state and local government
- Medical professionals - because they are the front lines in chemical or biological attacks
- Public works officials, such as those who oversee electrical grids and water supplies, and members of the food service industry who manage food supplies
- Officials in the transportation industry
- Officials in charge of facilities wherever large numbers of Americans congregate (schools, churches, sports and entertainment facilities, etc.)

Seminar workshop participants enthusiastically agreed that one of the most daunting tasks in bringing about a workable Homeland Defense system is in educating the members of and coordinating the actions of these disparate institutions.

### **The Local (Denver) Dimension**

Participants agreed that Colorado/Denver is very vulnerable, and not an altogether unlikely target. Ball Aerospace, Lockheed-Martin, communications centers and the Denver Federal Center (the largest assembly of federal employees outside of Washington), are all in the Denver metropolitan area. Moreover, 70 miles south of Denver are all of the defense institutions in Colorado Springs, including the US Air Force Academy and the headquarters for Strategic Air Command (SAC) and North American Radar Defense (NORAD). There are many targets along the Front Range that make the region an attractive target for those with axes to grind against the United States or federal government. Washington, New York and Boston are better prepared for such things because they are widely considered to be US centers of government, commerce and education and were always more likely to be considered potential terrorist targets. Denver and the front range, on the other hand, have not often been seen as a likely target, and are underprepared. Participants of the meeting agreed efforts need to be made to improve its preparedness. Moreover, if Denver/Colorado can come up with a viable Homeland Defense model, as was suggested in the meeting should be a next step, even without any federal assistance or oversight, perhaps other states/regions might as well, and this might put pressure on the federal government to encourage all regions of the United States to implement such a model. Participants agreed that this would enhance the security of the American people.

### **Civil Liberties Issues**

Any detractors of a Homeland Defense program that has any federal oversight are likely to point to the implications for individual civil liberties and the rights of states and municipalities vis-à-vis the federal government. A question raised at the seminar workshops was how much privacy and/or freedom Americans are prepared to give up to feel safer from the sorts of attacks discussed here.

Posse comitatus (i.e., “power of the county” - sheriffs in earlier American history were using the Federal militia to enforce the law because of their own lack of police) is a law that forbids active duty military forces from enforcing civil law (which would be martial law). The question was raised whether the deterioration of posse comitatus means a threat to civil liberties in cases of disaster or national emergency? The Rodney King riots, for example, saw US infantry enforcing the peace in Los Angeles. Expert participants suggested that posse comitatus isn’t holding back the federal government’s use of the military much now, but that they did not see that as a necessary danger, citing the fact that there are only 38,000 US army personnel inside the 50 states to defend the US, whereas there are 40,000 police officers in New York City alone.

In any event, it was clear from the discussions that moving forward with a comprehensive Homeland Defense strategy would necessitate a concomitant assessment of how such moves would affect individual civil liberties and states’ rights issues.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- The US needs to assess the probability of possible threats to the American homeland to decide where it will put its defense and preparedness dollars. The attendees of these seminar workshops generally agreed that the sorts of attacks against the United States addressed by Homeland Defense are more likely to occur than would be a traditional conventional or nuclear attack, which may necessitate some new thinking in defense priorities.
- More funding is needed at federal, state, and local levels to educate the political spectrum at these levels on the need for taking seriously the sorts of attacks addressed by Homeland Defense, to develop a system of coordination between authorities and medical professionals at all three levels to deal with such an attack, and for training between authorities and medical professionals at all three levels so they will be prepared if such an attack were to occur.
- A White Paper on Homeland Defense should be developed at the earliest date to submit to the Bush Administration for review and, hopefully, implementation.
- The Federal government should keep at the ready a national stockpile of vaccines/antidotes/antibiotics that can be distributed rapidly to emergency centers in case of chemical or biological attack.

### **Participants in the Workshop Seminars Consisted of Members of:**