

Homeland Security in America

Past, Present, and Future

By Roger L. Kemp

Eleven days after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, then-President Bush appointed the first-ever director of the nascent Office of Homeland Security. This new office, located in the White House, was to oversee and coordinate a comprehensive national strategy to safeguard the United States against terrorism and to respond to any future attacks. A year later, with the passage of the Homeland Security Act by Congress in November 2002, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) formally came into being as a stand-alone, Cabinet-level, department to further coordinate the unify national homeland security efforts, opening its doors on March 1, 2003. This new department integrated all or part of 22 different Federal departments and agencies into a single unified entity.

Since this time, only a little more than a decade ago, our nation has seen the initiation and implementation of two national warning systems, the most recent of which was launched in April of 2011. We've also seen the emergence of several emergency- and disaster-related citizen support groups, designed to serve law-enforcement agencies and first responders at all levels of government—city, county, state, and federal. Furthermore, we've seen critical information being placed on government websites for public officials, first responders, and citizens in general. This information has become more sophisticated in recent

years and continues to be improved. Federal government agencies are even entering the world of social media to further help inform citizens of all ages how to prepare for and respond to disasters and emergencies of all kinds.

These events, which continue to unfold in the dynamic and evolving field of homeland security, are highlighted below. To provide proper coverage, the information is presented under three headings: National Warning Systems; Citizen Assistance and Support Groups; and Homeland Security and the Future. This paper describes state-of-the-art trends in this field to help public officials and first responders become educated to better serve the public. The goal of all government officials during emergencies and disasters has always been to reduce loss of life and property. While this is still the goal, the processes and mechanisms for achieving it have become increasingly more sophisticated, as described below.

National Warning Systems

In order to improve coordination and communication among all levels of government and the public in the fight against terrorism, the President signed Homeland Security Presidential Directive 3 in March of 2002, creating the Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS). This advisory system was established to serve as the foundation for a simple communications struc-

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ture to disseminate information regarding possible terrorist attacks aimed at any level of government, as well as against our nation's citizens. It was replaced by the National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) in April of 2011. Both the HSAS and NTAS are explained below.

The United States has many federal alert systems in America, and each is tailored uniquely to a different sector of U.S. society: transportation, defense, agriculture, and weather, for example. These alert systems all provide vital and specific information in a variety of emergency situations.

The HSAS provided a coordinated national framework for these systems, allowing government officials and citizens to communicate the nature and degree of terrorist threats. This advisory system characterized appropriate levels of vigilance, preparedness, and readiness, in a series of graduated threat-condition levels.

The protective measures that correspond to each threat condition served to help local governments and their citizens decide what actions they should take to respond to, and counter, possible terrorist activity. Based on the threat level, federal government agencies implemented appropriate safeguards and protective measures. State and municipalities were encouraged to adopt compatible local preparedness and response systems.

State and local officials were informed in advance of national threat advisories whenever possible. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) conveyed relevant information to Federal, state, and local public officials, as well as to the private and nonprofit sectors. Heightened threat levels could be declared for the entire nation, or for a specific geographic area, functional, or industry sector. Changes in assigned threat conditions were made whenever the DHS deemed them necessary.

These threat conditions characterized the risk of a possible terrorist attack based on the best information available. Protective measures are the steps that should be taken by government and the

private sector to reduce their respective vulnerabilities. The HSAS contained five threat conditions with associated suggested protective measures. They were:

- Green: Low Condition
- Blue: Guarded Condition
- Yellow: Elevated Condition
- Orange: High Condition
- Red: Severe Condition

Since September 11, 2001, the United States has been at Threat Condition Orange—High Condition—only a few times. HSAS warnings were regional and/or functional in their nature and scope. When the nation went to Threat Condition Orange, and this threat level was not limited to specific geographic areas, public officials in cities would take steps so citizens knew that their municipal officials were making an effort to protect them under this threat condition.

The NTAS replaced the color-coded HSAS. The new warning system is designed to communicate information about terrorist threats by providing timely, detailed information to the public, government agencies, first responders, airports, and other transportation hubs, and to the private and nonprofit sectors. The new advisory system recognizes that Americans all share responsibility for the nation's security, and that they should always be aware of the heightened risk of terrorist attack in the country and what they should do to prepare for, and respond to, disasters and emergencies.

The new national alert system is designed to warn public officials and citizens of a credible terrorist threat against the United States. These alerts will include the statement that an imminent danger or elevated threat exists. Using available information, the alerts will provide a concise summary of the potential threat, information about actions being taken to ensure public safety, and recommended steps that individuals, communities, businesses, and governments can take to help prevent, mitigate, or respond to the threat.

All NTAS alerts, the secretary states, will be based on the nature of the threat. In some cases, alerts will be sent directly to law enforcement agencies or affected areas of the private sector, while in others, alerts will be issued more broadly to the American people through both official and media channels. National alerts under this system also contain a sunset provision—that is, an individual threat alert will be issued for a specific time period and then will automatically expire. It may be extended if new information becomes available or if the threat evolves. Also, as threat information changes, the secretary will announce updated alerts. Updated alerts will be distributed in the same way as the original alerts were to ensure that the same public officials and citizens receive the updated information.

Details of the alert have been standardized, and the secretary will follow a uniform alert format that contains a summary of the threat, indicating whether an imminent or elevated threat is likely. Each alert statement will also specify a duration, after which it either will expire or be officially extended by the DHS.

The next section of the alert notes details of the actual or pending danger, as well as a description of the affected geographic areas and the sectors involved. Finally, the last section of the new national alert document will describe how the public can help authorities, how public officials and citizens should plan for the emergency, and how public officials and citizens can stay informed. These new warnings also include instructions on how public officials and citizens can get additional information, the role of public safety and community leaders, and will provide links to appropriate DHS Web sites.

The new national alert system is based on the recommendations of a bipartisan task force of security experts, state and local elected and law enforcement officials, and other key stakeholders, which assessed the effectiveness of the previous national color-coded alert system. The results of

this nation-wide assessment, initiated by the Secretary of DHS, formed the basis of our nation's new National Terrorism Advisory System (commonly referred to as NTAS). Lastly, DHS encourages citizens to follow NTAS alerts for information about threats and to take an active role in security by reporting suspicious activity to local law enforcement authorities through the "If You See Something, Say Something" public awareness campaign.

Citizen Assistance and Support Groups

Since September 11, 2001, and the formation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), several citizen assistance and support groups have evolved related directly or indirectly to homeland security. Chapters of these groups are active in virtually in every state, and they work closely with their sponsoring and/or supporting federal agency. The federal agencies involved with these groups include the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Each of these eight citizen assistance and support groups is highlighted and explained below. It would behoove public officials to know which groups are located in their community so that when an emergency or disaster takes place, they can take advantage of the volunteer services available from the organizations within their own community.

Citizen Corps (CC). Following the attack of September 11, 2001, state and local government officials have increased opportunities for citizens to become involved in protecting their homeland and supporting local first responders. President Bush launched this group in January 2002—four months after the terrorist attacks. Citizen Corps was created to help coordinate volunteer activities that will make communities safer, and better

prepared to respond to emergencies.

It provides opportunities for people to participate in keeping their communities safer from the threat of terrorism, as well as from natural disasters of all kinds. Citizens receive training in first aid, emergency skills, and volunteer to assist local first responders. The CC currently has more than 1,200 chapters nationally. This program is coordinated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). This program, which FEMA administers, educates citizens about disaster preparedness and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue practices, and disaster medical operations. Using their training, CERT members can assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event and can take a more active role in preparing their community for both natural and man-made emergencies. CERT has more than 1,900 chapters throughout the nation.

Fire Corps (FC). This program promotes the use of citizen advocates to enhance the capacity of resource-constrained fire and rescue departments at all levels of public service, including volunteer, combination, and career. Citizen advocates can assist local fire departments in a range of activities, including fire safety outreach, youth programs, and administrative support services. Fire Corps provides resources to assist fire and rescue departments in creating opportunities for citizen advocates, and promotes citizen participation. This group has nearly 1,100 chapters throughout the country. It is funded through DHS and is managed through a partnership between the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), and the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC).

USAonWatch (USAOW). This group, which includes the nationwide network of Neighborhood Watch Programs (NWP), works to provide

information, training, and resources to citizens and law enforcement agencies throughout the country. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, NWPs have expanded beyond their traditional crime prevention role to help neighborhoods focus on disaster preparedness, emergency response, and terrorism awareness.

These groups also go by many other names, such as Crime Watch, Block Watch, and Business Watch, and have thousands of neighborhood chapters located in cities throughout the United States. USAonWatch-Neighborhood Watch is administered by the National Sheriff's Association (NSA) in partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), and the U. S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

Medical Reserve Corps (MRC). This program's purpose is to strengthen communities by helping medical, public health, and other volunteers offer their expertise on a long-term basis, as well as during local emergencies and other types of community need. MRC volunteers work in coordination with existing local emergency-response programs, and also supplement existing public health initiatives, such as outreach and prevention, immunization programs, blood drives, case management, care planning, and other efforts. This program, which has nearly a thousand chapters throughout the nation, is administered by the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS). The VIPS program provides support and resources for state and local law enforcement agencies interested in developing and/or enhancing a volunteer program, and for citizens who wish to volunteer their time and skills to assist a law enforcement agency. The program's ultimate goal is to enhance the capacity of these law enforcement agencies to use citizen volunteers. There are more than 2,200 VIPS chapters nationally. This program is funded by the U. S. Department of Justice (DOJ), and managed by the International Association of

Chiefs of Police (IACP) in partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), in the DOJ.

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). CNCS promotes volunteer service initiatives and activities that support homeland security and community safety. They are a federal agency that operates nationwide service programs such as AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America, among others. Participants in these programs may support Citizen Corps Council activities by helping to establish training and information delivery systems for neighborhoods, schools, and businesses, and by helping with family preparedness and crime prevention initiatives in a single community or across an entire region. Tens of thousands of citizens presently participate in these national, federally-sponsored, programs. This organization is coordinated nationally by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

InfraGard (IG). InfraGard is an information-sharing and analysis effort serving the interests and pooling the knowledge bases of a wide range of members. Administered by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), it is an association of businesses, academic institutions, state and local law enforcement agencies, and other participants all dedicated to sharing information and intelligence to prevent hostile acts against the United States, with its top priorities being the protection of cyber and public infrastructures. The chapters are linked with 56 FBI field office territories and have more than 47,000 members throughout the nation.

Homeland Security and the Future

The new field of homeland security is both dynamic and evolving. It has impacted public officials and citizens in local and state governments throughout the nation in many ways, and continues to do so. The United States has a new national warning system, the National Terrorism Advisory

System (NTAS), and community and regional citizen groups that are actively involved in homeland security, emergency management, and assisting first responders in their job responsibilities. It behooves local public officials, especially first responders, to know about these groups, and the services that they provide, especially those located within their own community.

Today there is a greater level of engagement and involvement among law enforcement agencies, and between other first responders, in city, county, state, and federal governments. There are now more meetings and disaster exercises that involve different levels of government, both separately and jointly, than ever before in our nation's history. Also, everyone from public officials to first responders has an expanding awareness of the services available from local and regional non-profit organizations. The practices and influence of first responders have been greatly enhanced in recent years by both profit-making businesses and nonprofit-organizations. It is critical for public officials to know the full range of resources and services available to them when they respond to emergencies and disasters, either natural or man-made.

Lastly, the field of homeland security has influenced the layout and construction of public buildings and facilities at all levels of government. Current and future government buildings, for example, are less likely to provide underground public parking. In many cases, land permitting, public parking space is provided away from public buildings and facilities.

Vehicular access to public buildings is also limited for obvious reasons—i.e., to deter car-bomb attacks. In addition, heating and air conditioning systems in new public buildings are no longer accessible by the public from ground floors or exterior locations. Citizen access to such systems is now restricted for security purposes. Lastly, many government buildings are being designed to blend in better with their surrounding

community, and not stand out as targets by being the largest and tallest buildings in the immediate area.

The field of homeland security has become nationally introspective in nature, since many recent illegal acts have been committed by home-grown “terrorists” rather than individuals sent or directed from abroad. While border security has increased in importance, law enforcement agencies at all levels of government—federal, state, and local—are working more closely to monitor and track down illegal activities, and plans for carrying them out, hopefully before they take place. In this regard, government officials at every level increasingly rely on reports and leads from alert private citizens. This activity may prove crucial to successfully preventing attacks on homeland targets in the future, since many of these are planned and conducted entirely within the country, rather than by outside terrorists who enter the United States illegally.

Our computer systems, and their record-keeping applications, have also become targets for computer hackers both foreign and domestic. The danger of cyber attacks is one of the biggest threats that the United States faces today. Computer systems, and their automated databases, are decentralized and can face intrusion and possible destruction from miles away. It is often difficult to even determine the source of an attempted intrusion, much less the individuals responsible for creating malware and viruses designed to perform illegal acts. More and more public officials are creating duplicate records and databases so as to have back-up systems available in case of cyber attack emergencies.

This is becoming a common practice throughout U.S. public agencies. Increasingly, private companies, too, are threatened by potential computer intrusions and cyber attacks. No sector, be it public, nonprofit, or private, will go untouched by this trend. Everyone must be prepared. Steps such as continuous monitoring of computer

use, and routine creation of duplicate systems to back-up records and databases, are likely to become commonplace over the next few years.

Sources Available for Further Information

Citizen Assistance and Support Group Websites

- Citizen Corps (CC)—<http://citizencorps.gov/>
- Citizen Emergency Response Team (CERT)—<http://citizencorps.gov/cert/>
- Fire Corps (FC)—<http://www.firecorps.org/>
- USAonWatch (USAOW)—<http://www.usaonwatch.org/>
- Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)—<http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/>
- Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS)—<http://www.policevolunteers.org/>
- Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS)—<http://www.serve.gov/>
- InfraGard (IG)—<http://www.infraguard.net>

Federal Government Websites

- Customs and Border Protection (CBP)—<http://cbp.gov/>
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—<http://www.dhs.gov/>
- Disaster Assistance Programs (DAP)—<http://www.disasterassistance.gov/>
- Emergency Preparedness for Citizens (EPS)—<http://www.ready.gov/>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—<http://www.fema.gov/>
- First Responder Information (FRI)—<http://www.dhs.gov/xfrstresp/>
- National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS)—<http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/ntas.shtm>
- Transportation Security Administration (TSA)—<http://www.tsa.gov/>

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