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Who Will Help the Emergency Responders?

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The ability of almost all local governments to deal with terrorist attacks or other incidents is limited. They can handle the daily menu of routine incidents that can be addressed and settled within a few hours, but they cannot alone manage major or catastrophic incidents.

Dr. John Powers, who has studied this matter, says that once casualties from a single incident reach 50, the local governments start to have trouble, and when mass casualties exceed 500, they cannot handle it. Some of the public safety agencies in the major metropolitan areas can handle large incidents, but they are the exception. Even major metropolitan areas would find it hard to deal alone with several thousand casualties.

So it is clear that, in a catastrophic incident or even several simultaneous major incidents, the emergency responders are going to need help.

Defining the Terms

Let me define those terms.

- A *routine incident* is one that a local jurisdiction can manage with its own resources.
- A *major incident* is one for which help is needed from several jurisdictions, including perhaps some state resources.
- A *catastrophic incident* is one for which federal resources will be needed immediately. (This, by the way, is the definition from the Catastrophic Incident Supplement to the National Response Plan.)

My thesis in general is that the way that the United States is approaching the problem of managing the con-

Talking Points

- The way that the United States manages the consequences of attacks can be improved a great deal, not just for catastrophic attacks, but also for major ones and some of the routine ones.
- Lateral reinforcement is economical and works well enough for routine incidents, but it will not work for a catastrophic incident or several simultaneous major incidents.
- The right way to expand the number and role of volunteers is to foster a buildup of volunteer groups from the bottom up. Americans resist regimentation and are not attracted to a federal program that is run from Washington by bureaucrats.
- The states are alleged to be a source of reinforcement, but although governors have the greatest responsibility for managing consequences of attacks, they also have the fewest resources with which to do it.

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sequences of attacks can be improved a great deal. This means not just for catastrophic attacks, but also for major ones and some of the routine ones.

Let us examine some of the ways that these emergency responders will get help. One way is lateral reinforcement from other localities. Another is to use volunteers from within the jurisdiction. The third is state resources. The fourth is the federal government.

Lateral Reinforcement

Lateral reinforcement occurs when neighboring fire or police departments send people and equipment to help one jurisdiction deal with a major incident. This can occur *ad hoc* or it can be prearranged.

This is a pretty good idea for small incidents. It makes best use of scarce and expensive equipment. Four or five counties, for example, can agree that one of them will buy an expensive capability and they will share it when an incident occurs. This is economical and works well enough as long as there are no catastrophic incidents or multiple simultaneous major incidents, but it will not work for a catastrophic incident or several simultaneous major incidents.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt was justifying the Lend Lease Act of 1940, which allowed the United States to “loan” war material to the British, he used a homely analogy that went like this:

Well you know it's like you have a neighbor whose house is on fire. And the neighbor comes running to you and shouts over the garden fence, “Neighbor, neighbor, my house is on fire, help me out, lend me your garden hose.” Well of course you're a good neighbor, you lend the garden hose to your neighbor and he puts out the fire and then he gives you the hose back.

This holds true only if your own house is not on fire also. There is also an old Italian proverb that goes like this: “If your neighbor's house is on fire, carry water to your own.” I assert that even the best neighbor will not loan you a garden hose if it is needed for his own house.

That is the fallacy of lateral reinforcement. When a catastrophic incident occurs, lateral rein-

forcement will not work because every responder will be needed in his or her own jurisdiction. These mutual aid compacts and multi-county agreements will work only when they are not needed. They provide an excuse for not buying everything or having enough people to deal with the greater than normal load.

So don't count on lateral reinforcement. It works only when it is not needed.

Volunteers

Now let's talk about volunteers. I want to distinguish between two kinds of volunteers: unsolicited and organized.

Unsolicited volunteers are the stuff of American legend. People like to hear about the fire fighter from Wisconsin or some place like that who hopped in his truck and drove to New York City to help with the Trade Towers attack.

The overall effect of these unsolicited volunteers is to be more trouble than they are worth. I had a long talk with a police officer from the Port Authority who told me his own officers were blocked by officers from a strange jurisdiction that arrived unasked and just took charge of a part of the perimeter. We don't want that. The policy has to be changed so that only trained and equipped responders who have been requested to come and have a place in the plan are used.

Another factor is that, in an age of terrorism, each incident has to be considered a source of contamination by radiation, disease agents, or chemicals until it is declared safe from these threats. Just think about responding in a radioactive environment. Gamma radiation from a nuclear detonation or release can be detected only by meters designed for that purpose. Only properly trained and equipped responders can be allowed into the hot zones. We don't want unsolicited volunteers rushing enthusiastically to their deaths.

Organized local volunteers, on the other hand, have or can have real value. There is merit in getting citizens involved in the response operation, doing things that they can do and helping the emergency responders in that way. But local volunteers have to be organized; they have to be disci-

plined to an extent; they have to be trained; and they have to be willing to work when there is trouble. This not only gets some necessary work done, but also causes the volunteers to forget their own troubles a bit.

Joe Muckerman, who used to head up DOD emergency preparedness, says that one reason the British could stand alone against Nazi Germany after France fell and the Luftwaffe was bombing nightly was because most of the people were involved in some way with the civil defense or military effort. Perhaps 60 percent or more were actively involved. They were too tired to give up.

In the frenzy after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government did try to promote volunteerism, but it has not taken hold. The reason why the Freedom Corps and other federal efforts are not meeting the need very well is that they are federal programs operated from the top down. In our country, that is the wrong way to build volunteer organizations.

The right way to expand the number and role of volunteers is to foster a buildup of volunteer groups from the bottom up. Americans resist regimentation, and they are not attracted to a federal program that is run from Washington by bureaucrats. On the other hand, Americans are very social, and most of them belong to one or more organizations at the local level.

Above all, it is really counterproductive to try to build volunteer organizations by sending federal dollars. Volunteers, by definition, work without pay. The joy of contributing is tainted by money from the federal government. The trick is to encourage and assist the development of local volunteer organizations *without* sending money. It is OK to send training packages and speakers, but not money. Money corrupts, and federal money corrupts absolutely.

The Cold War civil defense program was built on volunteer organizations. There was an entire network of these groups ready to help. They were supported by a relatively small cadre of paid civil defense or emergency management specialists. They were an important part of the plan.

Local volunteer groups can do a lot of good things before the attack by reporting suspicious

activity and after the attack by helping the authorities provide mass care, emergency housing, and other tasks that do not require rigorous training or entry into dangerous areas. One example of a really worthwhile organization is the Neighborhood Watch program—consisting of unpaid volunteers and organized from the ground up with a little bit of mentoring by other volunteers. Other local groups can be persuaded to help also in a national emergency preparedness program.

It takes a long time to build from the bottom, but it results in a system that works for the long haul.

State Resources

States are alleged to be a source of reinforcement. Don't believe it.

Governors have the greatest responsibility for managing consequences of attacks. They have the fewest resources with which to do it. Governors have no fire fighters to speak of. They have only the state police and the National Guard to provide for law and order. Some of them have state defense forces, but at this time, these are small organizations, some of which are not even allowed to bear arms. So it does not pay to expect help from the state authorities.

There are only 55,000 state troopers nationwide. This is an average of about one thousand per state. These officers specialize in highway patrol, and they each come with a car, so massing a couple of hundred state troopers is a parking problem.

The Army National Guard is the major resource available to governors, but there are only 350,000 of them—an average of about 7,000 per state—and Secretary Rumsfeld promises only that half of them will be available to the governors during the global war on terrorism. That number of people is adequate for routine incidents and some major emergencies, but not for catastrophic terrorist attacks.

It would help greatly if governors would enthusiastically and energetically raise, arm, train, and maintain large state defense forces equal to about half of their respective National Guard contingents. They don't seem to want to do that, for reasons I cannot understand.

Conclusion

That leaves the federal government as the best source of reinforcements for those overwhelmed local emergency responders waiting for help. This is a major topic in itself. The people at the Department of Homeland Security know this and plan to send help. They themselves need help in figuring out how to do that.

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