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Unfinished Business at FEMA: A National Preparedness Perspective

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Since the end of the Cold War 20 years ago, there has been a debate over domestic national security priorities, roles, responsibilities, and resources. Subsequent to our two most recent terrorist and natural catastrophic incidents, this debate has accelerated a substantial culture change.

The basic question is very simple: How do we nationally collaborate and allocate resources to effectively and efficiently prepare ourselves in order to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from catastrophic incidents? The answers are more elusive and complicated.

The debate is also an old one. Claire Rubin's recent work was an excellent overview of the history that has shaped the development of prevention, response, and recovery to catastrophic events in America since 1900 and their impact on the evolution of public policy.[1] Her analysis of periodic "focusing events" serves to inform the inherently political process of consensus building regarding resources and assignment of roles and responsibilities.

I've had the opportunity to observe and participate in this latest change process from several different perspectives over the past 20 years. Today, I'd like to first outline three key themes that constitute unfinished business for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's roles and responsibilities and then offer some possible courses of action.

Talking Points

- The foundation of homeland security and emergency management is built on state and local public safety, health care, and transportation systems.
- National media imply that the federal government is in charge for whatever happens, but recovery is primarily a state, local, and private-sector role.
- FEMA regions need to be given budget authority and to grow their personnel and capabilities to support the states, which should work together in networks that bring the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and universities to bear in developing regional capabilities.
- The long-term challenge is to reconcile the resource issues related to roles and responsibilities, personnel, and capabilities. The states and local governments need trained people on a continuous basis, and grants are a poor way of providing that resource.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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Theme #1: FEMA's Role in DHS and the Post Katrina Emergency Reform Act of 2006

We all remember the first 18 months after 9/11, when the nation was scrambling to decide how to organize to prevent the next attack. Tom Ridge led the effort in the White House Office of Homeland Security leading up to the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) by the Homeland Security Act of 2002.

In August 2003, within six months of Tom Ridge becoming the first DHS Secretary, I was leading the team that developed the State of Maryland's first homeland security program. Governor Robert Ehrlich had already determined his preferred structure, and his senior team had integrated with the U.S. Attorney–led Anti-Terrorism Advisory Council (ATAC). We interpreted and implemented the guidance in the National Strategy of July 2002 and the Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC) state template, and for the next two years we struggled to keep pace with the federally generated requirements.

In the period from post-9/11 until Katrina, FEMA was largely on the sidelines. This created an unfortunate controversy since FEMA has long-standing relationships coordinating preparedness with states and local governments. Ironically, this culminated in mid-August 2005, just prior to Katrina, at a contentious DHS-hosted national conference in Washington, D.C., with all the state homeland security advisers and emergency management directors to roll out the recently completed DHS reorganization called the Second Stage Review (2SR).

Two weeks later Katrina hit, and the uproar that followed produced many lessons learned that led to the Post Katrina Emergency Reform Act (PKEMRA) in October 2006. The legislation re-established FEMA's role for national preparedness within DHS and directed a long-overdue overhaul of FEMA.

I was nominated by the President in April 2007 to be the FEMA Deputy Administrator for National Preparedness, charged with implementing the PKEMRA preparedness vision. When I was confirmed in August 2007, Administrator Dave Paulison and Chief Operating Officer Harvey Johnson already had the reforms at FEMA well underway. I only had 18 months, so I picked four goals to drive the merger and acquisition activity that had been laid out by FEMA's executive team.

We focused on hiring key career leaders and cutting the vacancy rate in half, empowering the regions and providing them resources and templates to enhance regional preparedness, establishing a national operational planning system, and improving the national exercise and training portfolio. That left four key issues on the table simply for want of time and capacity. They were secure information sharing throughout FEMA to facilitate integration within DHS, recovery doctrine, preparedness-mitigation coordination, and developing an easy-to-use doctrine and publication process and library.

The negotiation of roles and responsibilities to accommodate the integration of FEMA within the department was a daily activity. FEMA benefited greatly from being part of a 200,000-person organization. The stature of the DHS Secretary ensures resource leverage for the long haul and significant support for FEMA's mission. The challenge is to continue the consensus process to make each stronger.

Theme #2: State, Local, and Private-Sector Preparedness Resources

I've come to believe that the foundation of homeland security and emergency management is built on state and local government public safety and their health care and transportation systems. In the post–Cold War, late 1980s and early to mid-1990s, the issues of devolution and the new national defense scenarios were the focus of attention. During that period, I was a Naval Reserve officer just off of active duty and was pursuing and serving in local elected office.

Almost without notice, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the Murrah Building bombing in 1995, the bombing of the Khobar Towers in 1996, the 1998 embassy bombings, and the USS *Cole* incident in 2000 unfolded like a terrorist symphony

1. Claire B. Rubin, ed., *Emergency Management: The American Experience 1900–2005* (Fairfax, Va.: Public Entity Risk Institute, 2007).

leading to the 9/11 crescendo. The American public hadn't been alarmed by this pattern until 9/11 hit, but it was obvious to the federal government and law enforcement.

The federal government's growing concern was made clear in 1997 by the passage of the Nunn–Lugar–Domenici Act and the focus on the readiness of 120 cities for weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The mantra at the time was "not if, but when."

The federal government took the fragmented national security lead early on, but there still was not a consensus on the roles of state and local governments. Until the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the federal government was unsure about how to structure its roles and responsibilities.

State, local, and private-sector leaders have struggled to identify the resources to re-engineer a seamless public safety and public health/hospitals system to integrate them into our largely federal national security framework.

- During the mid to late '90s, as an executive at a major medical center, we initiated a focus on our role as a private hospital in WMD preparedness as well as establishing a relationship with the U.S. Air Force for trauma training.
- In the immediate aftermath of the post-9/11 shock wave, we were bombarded with the hysteria from the anthrax attack and its effect on our staff and patients.
- We were later confronted with the smallpox threat and whether to vaccinate our key staff in light of the medical risks.

These very real situations place a premium on individual, state, and local preparedness. This requires re-engineering many vertical functions into horizontal processes. The public is demanding this type of integration. The shrinking global environment, the Internet, and the 24/7 news cycle put intense and immediate focus on any incident that occurs anywhere in the world. Most citizens don't recognize the difference between levels of government. They expect that these details have been worked out ahead of time.

Theme #3: Recovery Doctrine

The lack of well-developed and agreed-upon recovery doctrine is a major issue for large-scale disaster recovery. The role of the federal government in recovery has been at issue since before 1900[2] and continues today. The Red Cross played the lead role prior to 1950, and subsequent legislation has added more responsibility to the federal government for funding recovery. There has never been an appetite for making disaster victims whole through public funding, and that creates a gap between expectation and reality.

In the aftermath of Katrina, the FEMA Administrator and his team focused on ensuring that the next responses would be effective. A three-year process led to the National Response Framework (NRF) as a replacement for the National Response Plan (NRP) and the update of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). The NRF documented the roles and responsibilities for response and recognized that FEMA has a major role in short-term recovery, but FEMA is not organized, equipped, or resourced to lead a major long-term recovery effort.

As we saw after Katrina, national media and communications create a public expectation for immediate and well-organized recovery processes that produce results that make people whole. They also imply that the federal government is in charge for whatever happens. The reality is just the opposite.

The fact is that recovery is primarily a state, local, and private-sector role. Over the past 20 years, response doctrine like the NRF has been debated and has evolved. Recovery doctrine, however, has not received such attention. It's much more complicated, harder to address, far more expensive, and longer-term in scope.

Now that I have outlined the themes, let me offer a few potential courses of action.

Action #1: Integrate and Strengthen FEMA's Role Within DHS as Envisioned by PKEMRA.

PKEMRA laid out an ambitious path for the long-term strengthening and development of emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. It required a

2. *Ibid.*

major overhaul of FEMA to include its integration into DHS and the mandate to build the FEMA regions into a decentralized distributed capability for DHS.

The FEMA overhaul is at least a five- through seven-year effort that would, by its very nature, require crossover into the next Administration. In this new Administration, there is an opportunity for a fresh start. FEMA was given a very expansive mission within PKEMRA. FEMA has not fully exercised that role yet.

The Department should embrace FEMA and learn how to fully use its strengths, capabilities, and regional structure. The FEMA regions should be used to integrate programs at the regional level to engage the states and not try to recreate regions or manage programs from Washington, D.C. The department should look to the FEMA regional administrators as key DHS executives in each region.

FEMA, on the other hand, must continue to ask how it can integrate itself to support the overall national mission within DHS. It's not an either/or proposition. It's both. The department should assess those inherent operational functions that FEMA has and learn how to deploy programs through FEMA rather than around it.

The department also has to be more policy-oriented and continue to improve multi-year programming processes that encourage longer-term resource planning. This will help FEMA move away from the cycle of using disaster relief funding as a quick fix for long-standing infrastructure management deficiencies. These are long-term problems that require discipline and an understanding of how resources are brokered in Washington, D.C.

FEMA must continue to build its infrastructure in the management disciplines like human capital, financial management, procurement, information systems, and facilities management. FEMA has to build its capabilities for routine secure information sharing within all its directorates and offices to allow it to better engage key DHS functions. There needs to be direct coordination between mitigation and preparedness.

The Disaster Work Force must be overhauled and effectively trained, and the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) must be properly resourced for that mission. These initiatives are nascent and must be aggressively nurtured. The federal coordination officers need a WMD training program and linkages into DHS programs.

FEMA regions need to be given budget authority and continue to grow their personnel strength and capabilities to support the states. The states should be encouraged to work together in lightweight distributed networks that bring the private sector, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and universities to bear on developing regional capabilities.

Finally, FEMA should use the National Exercise Simulation Center to support operational planning assessment, especially in the area of mass casualty preparedness. Since I first attended a meeting on this topic sponsored by the American Hospital Association in Chicago, in March 2000, and worked on the Modular Emergency Medical System (MEMS) program at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, it has been clear that this problem requires much more focus. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has done a remarkable job of building national capability, but it still hasn't been effectively integrated into operational planning and the national exercise program.

Action #2: Provide Direct Federal Assistance for State, Local, and Private-Sector Preparedness.

Conceptually, the federal government has been leasing the national public safety and public health/hospital infrastructure from state, local, and private-sector interests for national security. Prior to 9/11, the federal government used small amounts of grant money to influence behavior. In reaction to 9/11, this approach and the funding exploded. This has had a mixed record of success and has caused significant concerns about value, devolution, unfunded mandates, and intrusion into states' rights.

One has to ask if grants are the appropriate resource to compensate for these assets and additional capability development. Dr. Samuel Clovis has written some excellent articles that discuss historical perspective on the use of grants by the federal government in a variety of issues that demonstrates a pattern of top-down federal direction.[3]

As the public interest waxes and wanes, the funding levels will begin and have begun to drop.

The challenge to sustain long-term effectiveness is to reconcile the resource issues related to roles and responsibilities, personnel, and capabilities. The states and local governments need trained people on a continuous basis, and grants are a poor way of providing that resource.

I would argue that we should consider a system of direct federal assistance with cooperative agreements for those things that are needed by the federal government and reduce grants as an approach to state and local collaboration. The reality is that state and local governments fund and operate the national infrastructure for public safety and public health. We examined 2006 census data that suggest that states, locals, and health systems spent $300 billion for that purpose. During that same period, the Office of Management and Budget identified $52 billion of federal resources for homeland security, which included $3 billion for grants.

Recently, Matt Mayer has authored a report for The Heritage Foundation's Center for Data Analysis that drills into the state and local homeland security expenditures and federal grants for 25 states and the District of Columbia.[4] The data clearly demonstrate that state and local resources are the backbone of our homeland security effort.

There are some positive examples of federal direct assistance that already have been tried and have proven effective at some level. The Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) model provides federal resources, frameworks, and support while integrating state and local resources into them. At the time I was in Maryland, we had outstanding special agents in charge at the FBI, and 60 percent of the JTTF was staffed by state and local officers. The federal government has provided analysts at Fusion Centers and critical infrastructure protective security advisors (PSAs) at the state level.

Preparedness for catastrophic events requires much more detailed and rigorous operational planning. State and local governments don't maintain operational planning resources and capabilities. The private sector and, in most cases, NGOs are not woven into current operational plans. To avoid duplicating expensive capabilities, state and local governments rely on dual use of resources, which gives rise to the "all-hazards" concept. To bridge this gap, FEMA regional planners could be provided directly to states to build these catastrophic operational plans.

FEMA has worked hard since 2006 to build a strong coordination with the Department of Defense (DOD). The National Guard and Northern Command are a valuable resource for direct federal assistance. The National Guard has a long history of being a state asset supported by the federal government in a dual role. The development of the Civil Support Teams is a good example of recent positive support.

There has been some perception that Northern Command's role in domestic security has expanded the role of the military too far into domestic affairs. This issue should be tackled by reinforcing the role of DOD as a support to civilian authority through FEMA. The assignment of defense coordinating officers to the FEMA regions was an excellent move in that direction.

Department of Defense resources also have to be adapted in many cases to meet domestic needs. While at Maryland, I used the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) trainers to teach our state officials the vulnerability assessment tools known as Joint Staff Integrated Vulnerability Assessment (JSIVA). The one-week course provided good training but wasn't tailored for domestic civilian audiences.

Action #3: Create a Consensus-Based National Recovery Doctrine that Documents and Assigns the Proper Roles and Responsibilities.

Recovery is primarily a land development, engineering, and project management core competency. Housing and business continuity are key to recovery. The nation and the private sector learned a great deal from Y2K about business continuity and supply chain resilience.

3. Samuel H. Clovis, Jr., "Toward Collaborative Federalism: A Way Ahead for Homeland Security," paper prepared for Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference, April 2007.
4. Matt A. Mayer, *An Analysis of Federal, State, and Local Homeland Security Budgets*, Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. CDA09-01, March 9, 2009.

Recovery should be the preparedness focus for state and local elected officials. Elected officials must clearly understand the response process to give direction and leadership to responders and emergency management officials, but they must have clear plans in place to transition quickly to and lead and direct the recovery once the response is winding down.

As Maryland's Homeland Security Director during the Tropical Storm Isabel response phase, our team recommended to Governor Ehrlich and he established a Recovery Task Force that was co-chaired by our Secretary of Planning and Secretary of Housing and Community Development. That long process went on for almost three years until we got most people back into their homes.

Each state should have a state disaster housing plan that would be a requirement to receive Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grants. These plans should take into consideration the state, local, and private-sector roles and responsibilities to include zoning, design and construction codes, building permits, civil engineering, and environmental issues, just to name a few. I was a Zoning Board member during my service as a legislator on the Howard County Council in Maryland, and even in normal periods, development issues are complex and time-consuming.

In addition, the nation should consider calling on the Urban Land Institute to be engaged in this issue. They are the premier land development organization that studies difficult and complex development issues, and this is one of them.

The National Housing Strategy was developed in 2008, but not in the context of a national recovery doctrine. The doctrine is critical because the federal government currently has an *ad hoc* approach to each new incident. National recovery has historically been a problem of who pays for the recovery.[5] The Housing Strategy was written with the intent of state strategies eventually driving recovery preparedness.

FEMA facilitated state housing task forces in Iowa after the spring 2008 flooding and in Texas after Ike in September 2008. Both these efforts were admittedly *ad hoc* but were designed to kick-start the concepts in the Housing Strategy and engage state partners.

Toward the end of 2008, the Homeland Security Council initiated a White Paper process supported by the Preparedness Directorate to define the scope and organize an initiative to develop a national recovery doctrine. As with the National Response Framework, this effort requires significant involvement of state, local, and private-sector interests and the National Advisory Council (NAC). This very difficult work must continue and be documented before the next catastrophic incident occurs.

Conclusion

The nation's preparedness has come a long way in the past 20 years. DHS and FEMA have made progress, but there is significant unfinished business. The challenge is to find ways to continuously improve, to sustain the effort over the long haul, to better leverage federal resources to get major initiatives done, and to encourage states to build recovery plans that will put them in charge of a large-scale recovery.

—Dennis R. Schrader is President of DRS International, LLC, and former Deputy Administrator for National Preparedness at the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

5. Rubin, ed., *Emergency Management: The American Experience 1900–2005*.