

* Michael O'Hanlon's views expressed at the Keynote Speaker Series meeting 1/23/03 are summarized in the article below.

Prepare our Cities for War with Iraq

The Washington Times, December 31, 2002

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While the President decides whether to march to Baghdad, Saddam Hussein may be poised to bring the battle to American cities via terrorism. Yet Washington's focus on creating a new Department of Homeland Security has left America's cities not much better protected than they were sixteen months ago.



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The much-ballyhooed but still unfunded federal First Responder Initiative has given American cities a false sense of security. Only \$3.5 billion has been promised—and not yet appropriated—by Congress. Of this, only 75 percent will make it to the county level, where another bureaucratic bite will be taken before the money is passed on to cities.

We can't make up for a year lost to other federal priorities, but here are five things the Administration should do right away to bolster local efforts to prevent and respond to a terrorist attack.

- **Provide Interconnector Technology to Link Local Emergency Radio Systems in America's Largest Urban Areas.** On September 11, New York Police Department helicopter pilots reported their assessment that the towers were likely to collapse imminently, unaware that the firefighters in the buildings could not hear the transmissions. Different jurisdictions in the Washington, DC area were also unable to cross-communicate during the sniper attacks of this past October.

And the problem persists. In Los Angeles County alone, 88 independent jurisdictions must be able to communicate in a major emergency. However their radio frequencies are still incompatible, with some departments using analog systems while others use digital.

The federal government could eliminate this disconnect by immediately providing the twenty largest American cities with off-the-shelf interconnector technology that makes radio frequencies compatible through instantaneous patching systems. Portable systems are ready now. For example, the InfraLynx system is an electronic interconnector housed in a Hummer vehicle that costs approximately \$800,000. The Raytheon First Responder is housed in a Chevy Suburban and uses off-the-shelf technology to patch radio, satellite, cellular and computer transmissions.

- **Secure America's Ports and Harbors.** As Senator Bob Graham has argued, port security remains America's Achilles heel. Each year more than 7.5 million containers enter the U.S. The adjoining Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach alone handle more than 43 percent of America's cargo, well over three million inbound containers annually, including critical industrial and petrochemical supplies. Only about two percent of these containers are inspected, leaving literally millions of opportunities for smuggling weapons of mass destruction and other terrorist tools into our cities. That basic fact cannot be changed this winter, but other precautions can nonetheless be taken.

Federal funding is urgently needed for basic port security. Credentialing workers and controlling access at the L.A. ports alone will cost \$35 million. Federal action is urgently needed to create a high-risk cargo inspection station at the port. Today suspicious containers are actually trucked 15

miles through the city before inspectors have the opportunity to examine potentially lethal cargo, a problem unfortunately not limited to Los Angeles.

- Conduct emergency weapons of mass destruction training for local law enforcement on military bases. U.S. troops are currently undergoing training to handle the chemical or biological attacks that Saddam may launch abroad. Why aren't we providing our first responders with the same training opportunities for the attacks he may launch here?

As former Senators Gary Hart and Warren Rudman recently pointed out, from 1996-99 the federal government provided WMD response training to only 134,000 out of the nation's nine million first responders. Left to their own devices, most local training regimens are inadequate. For example, Los Angeles' firefighters receive only one hour of training in weapons of mass destruction each year. As a partial and quick remedy, the military's knowledge and tactics about responding to WMD attacks must be shared with local emergency personnel through immediate crash courses.

- Protect air intakes in large buildings, subways, and similar sites. Terrorists could introduce anthrax or other such agents into the air intakes of many heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems in the country today. Many of these are still unprotected and at ground level. At a minimum, they should be monitored, cordoned off by locked doors and fences, and patrolled. The federal government should provide a clear game plan, and possibly some financial compensation for such efforts.

- Step up measures to guard toxic chemical plants and trucking. The Bush administration has left it to the private sector to protect the chemical industry. As argued by Peter Orszag of the Brookings Institution, that is not an adequate response, given the serious consequences to the country as a whole that could result from a major attack. In the short term, some chemical plants need to adopt safety practices closer to those of nuclear facilities. Chemical/toxic transportation firms should lock up their trucks and do background checks on their drivers. Again, what is needed from Washington is a combination of clear mandates as well as some financial and technical assistance.

Unfortunately, as things stand, Baghdad isn't the only city that will be jittery as the U.S. ramps up for confrontation in the Gulf. From Chicago to Washington to Houston to Miami to Los Angeles, it would be comforting to see a commensurate level of federal resources hit the streets for every U.S. ship that sets out to sea.

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