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Roles, Missions, & Functions for National Security Emergency Preparedness

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The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) needs to fundamentally change its approach to national security emergency preparedness in order to adapt to the challenges facing the United States. The old ways of managing national security emergency preparedness will not work in the future. New roles, missions, and functions must be devised to enable the government to respond to peoples' demands and expectations and at the same time help create a government mechanism for emergency management that works better and costs less.

Once FEMA has adapted to these new roles, missions, and functions, it should take the lead in creating the mechanism for dealing effectively with the changed environment and circumstances of national security emergency preparedness. We expect the President to act in an emergency; he needs an executive agency to integrate government responses to crises, whether domestic or foreign. No single government agency has, nor can it have, the range of authority that FEMA has been given over the years for the purpose of steering the nation through a time when survival is at stake. Because the very nature of national security is changing, FEMA needs to transform the way in which it serves the President in carrying out his national security emergency preparedness responsibilities.

The Need for Change

FEMA's emergency response tasks have traditionally been managed under two different but related categories: domestic and national defense. In time of certain types of domestic crises, the President calls on FEMA to coordinate the federal response to the emergency. Recent natural disasters

have found FEMA in action throughout the country, helping to coordinate the activities of all levels of government and thousands of volunteers who have turned out to help their fellow citizens.

FEMA also has a set of duties and responsibilities associated with national security. In time of general war, or a major national security crisis, FEMA would be the President's executive agent for a broad set of authorities that would become operative in a declared state of emergency. Changes in the nature of national security, however, require us to consider changing the ways and means available to the President to respond to a national security crisis.

During the Cold War FEMA coordinated certain aspects of federal planning—civilian and military—in anticipation of a national security emergency. Cold War national security emergency preparedness missions fell into three categories: continuity of government, civil defense, and economic mobilization. These missions were carried out under a broad policy known as graduated response. Missions—directives and tasks assigned by the President to agency and department heads—allow the President to develop, coordinate, and integrate policy derived from the programs and activities that guide federal emergency preparedness and capabilities. The relevant programs and activities are established by the National Security Act, the Civil Defense Act, the Defense Production Act, and international treaties.

New types of scenarios promise to reshape traditional threat calculations for national security emergency preparedness. For reasons that will be described later, the scenarios also have the potential to blur the distinctions between FEMA's two forms of emergency preparedness. New scenarios might include concurrent mid-intensity conflicts in two separate regions of the world; multiple catastrophic natural disasters occurring simultaneously in the United States; a catastrophic natural disaster causing a major technological accident; or a catastrophic natural or technological disaster in the United States concurrent with the start of a regional military conflict involving US forces. In the past the country could afford to treat these possibilities as lesser included cases of a potential global war with the Soviet Union. Today they must be treated as real possibilities on their own merit since we no longer have the larger including case—and its associated resources—to rely on.

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For the predictable future, national security emergencies may not resemble emergencies associated with natural disasters. During the Cold War our military strategy called for preparedness to fully mobilize our population and economy. We had the luxury of planning and exercising events such as "mass casualty drills" for both wartime and peacetime emergencies because resources available from a large military establishment could be diverted to meet civil needs. With US military strategy and force structure in transition—in both the active and reserve components—we are entering a period in which DOD resources may no longer be available to support such activities. FEMA should therefore consider how it might respond in emergencies when resources are available only from other federal agencies or the states.

Another fundamental change in the national security environment that will have a profound effect on national security emergency preparedness roles, missions, and functions is that the character of our state and society are undergoing basic change. The United States is experiencing in the 1990s an increase in the number of organized groups and interests it is attempting to serve. If this shift continues, its consequences will challenge all government agencies—federal, state, and local—to find new ways and means to define and then respond to emergencies declared to be catastrophic.

Finally, the government itself is changing. If its declining share of federal resources is an indicator, the Department of Defense is no longer the most important cabinet agency. A National Economic Council has been created and made equal to the National Security Council, and economic security has become an important concept in its own right. The National Performance Review has set new benchmarks for creating a government that works better and costs less. The review asks federal agencies to divest their bureaucracies of outdated methods, streamline their processes, reduce in size, and embrace the information revolution in order to increase productivity.

In the new international security environment and in the new domestic context, old methods of preparing for national security emergencies will not suffice. All elements of the federal government, as they proceed with "reinvention," must examine the assumptions on which huge ranges of long-established policy are based. FEMA is no exception to this rule. As one of the first agencies to undergo reinvention, FEMA should also accept the requirement to start with the underlying assumptions to develop new approaches to emergency preparedness, whether domestic or national security. The remainder of this analysis deals with the changing national security aspects of emergency preparedness.

FEMA's New Role: The Virtual Organization

FEMA has been organized along the lines of a functional model; its responsibilities for integrating national security emergency preparedness were designed to be mutually supportive. This organization is consistent with management theory of the 1980s, when similar matrix models were considered good

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business practice. It was particularly appropriate for FEMA's Cold War mission of integrating and coordinating national security aspects of emergency preparedness in a time of a single overwhelming military threat.

For the future, however, no single department will have the kinds of emergency resources that DOD had in the Cold War. Each cabinet department will be responding to multiple societal demands in the context of a more differentiated political culture. Consequently, FEMA's role as coordinator and advisor to the President will be more important during this period of variegated military threats than it has been since it was established. Stated simply, in time of emergency, FEMA will have to assemble and direct assets from many agencies comparable to the way it formerly was able to access those assets from and through a single agency—DOD. To shape and manage the crisis responses of a dozen or more bureaucracies, each with its own constituencies and problems, will require innovation equal in concept and scope to the changes occurring within DOD and other downsizing agencies.

A fluid, supple approach to organizing for the kind of emergency preparedness needed for the future can be developed by applying the concepts of the information revolution to bureaucratic structures. By transforming itself into the government's first “virtual organization,” FEMA can capitalize on its unique core competencies, built up during the Cold War years, to serve as the President's planner and manager for national security emergency preparedness into the 21st century.

In business terms, the virtual organization replaces the traditional focus on product and self-preservation with a focus on customers and tasks. It bundles its products and services in ways that are targeted more discretely on customer needs. FEMA's new functional organization approach to “teaming” on issues could become a basis for eventual transition to a virtual national security emergency preparedness organization. In such a reorientation, organizational boundaries and relationships would be managed to allow individuals to move freely within their function while retaining the individual's motivation and loyalty to the larger corporate entity.

In large measure, greater fluidity is made possible by exploiting knowledge infrastructures and networks. All the principles of the National

Performance Review—benchmarking, accountability, teamwork, and learning—are key attributes of the virtual organization. The principal theoretical advantage of the virtual organization over any other bureaucratic model lies in its capacity to respond quickly to challenges and opportunities. The nature of our national security emergency preparedness tasks has not changed, only the ways and means available to respond to them.

Over the years, FEMA directors have built a far-reaching network of relationships for emergency preparedness among the federal government agencies and the states. No other federal agency has FEMA's institutional capacity for finding and bringing together quickly the organizational units needed to get things done in the interest of national security—all without having vast resources of its own to do so. FEMA is the ideal government entity to exploit the potential of the virtual organization model, because FEMA has been operating since its inception as a builder of ad hoc responses to short-notice situations.

New Definitions for Old Functions

The new strategic era requires us to redefine the functional responsibilities for national security emergency preparedness. These functions should capitalize on FEMA's core competencies of disaster response and industrial mobilization. The functions include warning, mobilization, response, and information.

Warning. It is not likely that our ability to provide early warning of a national security emergency will improve for the foreseeable future. In both Asia and Europe, economic and political trends should cause us to be vigilant for our own security as regional conflicts become the norm. Four types of warning will be necessary.

- Force structure warning time will be required to provide time for military units—which are not likely to be as ready for combat in the new era as they were during the Cold War—to get ready and deploy.

- Technological warning time will demand that we maintain visibility into the military relevance of technological developments around the world so that US forces can maintain their commanding lead in operational capabilities.

- Economic warning time is necessary to be able to initiate reconstitution of the defense industrial base to support a military buildup.

- Sectoral warning time will be required for sectors of the economy unique to national security needs. Even in those sectors where dual-use technologies and defense conversion have reduced defense-dedicated and unique production capacities, the commercial segments of the sectors will require detailed planning and preparation for their reintegration into military production processes.

Agile Mobilization. Graduated Mobilization Response (GMR) was designed to facilitate the marshaling of resources in a national security

emergency. It also presented potential enemies with the threat of a step-by-step mobilization, through which we could signal our intent to respond to the threat of aggression with overwhelming force. For the new era, the mobilization function must be far more flexible and much more finely calibrated than was necessary during the Cold War. Regional military threats, unlike the threat posed by the Soviets, will probably not be attenuated by the logic and rituals of deterrence.

- Stealthy mobilization may become an important way to mask vulnerabilities of our intended response. Because of the anticipated specificity of mobilization actions, our shortcomings could become visible to our opponents since they would not be embedded in a broad, nationwide mobilization.

- Selective surge mobilization will be required for two kinds of production capabilities: the few remaining defense-unique manufacturing sectors, and the industrial and technological sectors dedicated to commercial use in peacetime. Participation of the latter will be required to meet military production requirements in a crisis. There are new opportunities available to national security emergency preparedness planners here, as commercial enterprises adopt the tenets of “agile manufacturing” to respond to changes imposed on them by market forces. That same business agility will create new access to commercial resources and help FEMA to adopt “agile” characteristics for emergency preparedness.¹

Flexible Mobilization Response. Graduated response should be replaced by a flexible approach that can respond to the more complex challenges of future national security emergency preparedness. Graduated mobilization response sought a consensus among 26 federal agencies in preparing a mobilization response that would be carried out during a period of several years. Flexible mobilization response must focus on directed response—not consensus—and crisis action within a six-month window of activity. It will involve members of a few key federal agencies whose operations have been tailored specifically to meet the crisis at hand.

The principal variable to be managed in a future national security crisis will be time, not resources. Consequently, FEMA should adopt an approach to competing in time that is based on emerging commercial practices. Under this concept of managing time, our purpose is not to confront an opponent with the threat of a progressive graduated response. Instead, the mobilization concept must convince us that we can meet any future national security threat by intense, focused activity in specific industrial sectors for short periods.

Information Wars. The need for new forms of mobilization response will require the national security emergency preparedness community to develop new methods of command, control, communications, and intelligence (C³I). Acquiring, transmitting, and applying emergency preparedness information will become a new form of battlespace. Not only will we have our own

“We can no longer rely on purely ad hoc lashing together of agency C³I functions as an emergency unfolds.”

complex information systems to manage, we must be prepared to do so in spite of active attempts to disrupt, deceive, delay, and destroy our ability to communicate. We can no longer rely on purely ad hoc lashing together of agency C³I functions as an emergency unfolds. Integrating mechanisms must be deliberately designed, planned, built, prepared, and exercised in peacetime to ensure timely, effective, and continuous emergency response.

The national security emergency preparedness system should exploit information technologies and the national information infrastructure to create “virtual baskets” of emergency response capability—carefully researched sets of information and prospective policy options—awaiting call-up by FEMA on short notice. For this purpose, FEMA should build electronic gateways to all information management, intelligence, and command and control systems under development in the federal agencies. FEMA and its coordinating agencies must be able to rapidly integrate state, local, and regional information architectures as well. Such a system will require experimentation and exercise in order to develop and maintain the ability to mobilize in six months rather than six years. A FEMA capability equal to this challenge might become a type of neural network of information gateways for asset identification, planning, training, testing, and crisis response. Such a system would have to be tested frequently and exercised extensively in a virtual mode in non-crisis times. And only a system designed to minimize peacetime resource demands could survive the approval process. This is one of the rare instances in the new era when resources applied to the security function will add value to the tasks associated with domestic emergency preparedness.

Organizing for New Missions

Despite the many similarities between preparing to respond to natural disaster and preparing to respond to war, there remains one very powerful difference between the two functions. In a natural or technological disaster, the purpose of national emergency response is to help people: to mitigate their suffering and restore disrupted functions to pre-emergency capacity. In a national security mobilization, we want not only to remedy the suffering of our own people but, more important, we want to defeat an enemy. Because emergency in the national security situation is defined as survival of the

nation, it may be more important at times during a mobilization to divert resources from mitigation efforts to the destruction of our adversary.

The requirement to set the priorities necessary to deprive—or even give the impression of depriving—citizens of the government services that are rightfully theirs should not be taken lightly. FEMA will have to manage with a lean and effective executive structure; it will also need access to the requisite executive authority to establish the priorities. A system designed to manage priorities under those circumstances would have at least the following characteristics and attributes:

- The Vice President serves as the President's national security emergency preparedness authority and has three assigned deputies: the Director of FEMA, the Secretary of the Army, and the Chief, National Guard Bureau.

- The Director of FEMA should have delegate agency funding authority—appropriations to FEMA which are fenced for obligational authority in other agencies solely for the purpose of meeting national security emergency preparedness functions—to grant dollars to the departments and agencies for national security emergency preparedness.

- Legislative authorities for national security emergency preparedness would be consolidated into an omnibus National Emergencies Act. This act would be a single, understandable, flexible, and all-inclusive piece of legislation codifying FEMA's responsibilities and the roles of the other federal agencies. The missions of each governmental body would be broadly stated in this legislation, with the details of their specific assignments and tasks provided in Executive Orders.

More detailed analysis of specific mission assignments could be made once FEMA completes its reorganization and has absorbed its new roles and functions.

Conclusion

National security emergency preparedness will remain a vital part of US national security strategy; traditional forms for managing it will not suffice, particularly for FEMA. As we enhance our competitive edge in the world economy, we should ensure that national security emergency preparedness capabilities receive appropriate attention. Major qualitative and quantitative gains are possible if creative leadership meets the challenge of change. FEMA's unique experience in dealing with preparedness and response is the foundation on which to build a new strategy for national security emergency preparedness. FEMA can and should take the lead in adapting that strategy for the 21st century.

NOTE

1. On the topic of agility, see the article by Mike Austin, "Managing the US Defense Industrial Base: A Strategic Imperative," in this issue of *Parameters*, 24 (Summer 1994), 27-37.