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**Rural America a Potential Haven for Terrorists**

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Rural America can be considered the “soft underbelly” of America’s Homeland Security efforts. Because it is sparsely populated and because of its geographic distinctiveness, it can provide havens for terrorists to plan, coordinate, train, manufacture chemical-biological-nuclear agents, and /or assemble traditional weapons as well as weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, the people who inhabit most of rural America are under the assumption that, “it won’t happen here”, so they are in a form of denial. In fairness to the citizens of rural America, much of their denial can be attributed, in part, to the federal government which has focused its counter-terrorism efforts primarily on major urban areas.

The people of rural America have been lulled into a false sense of safety and security from terrorist attacks. In a December 24, 2003, article the New York Times reported, “Separate bits of intelligence collected from sources who are tied to extremist groups refer to cities like New York, Washington, Los Angeles and Las Vegas — sites often considered possible terrorist targets — as well as remote areas in rural Virginia and Alaska, said an F.B.I. official who spoke on condition of anonymity. The locales were first reported Tuesday by The Los Angeles Times”.

The logic behind focusing much of the nation’s counter-terrorism attention on the major cities is sound but somewhat limited in scope. Large cities are, without question, targets for certain types of terrorist attacks as were seen on September 11, 2001, or for homicide / suicide bombers etc. Large cities provide terrorists with almost instant live television coverage. This is exactly what they want. There are, however, other types of terrorist activities that lend themselves to the advantages that rural America has to offer. Rural areas can be used for the clandestine manufacture and storage of both traditional and weapons of mass destruction, chemical- biological-nuclear agents, as well as safe houses (prior to or after a terrorist event) and training grounds, to mention a few. It’s relatively safe to say that a terrorist cell building a nuclear device currently has less chance of being detected by a mobile radiation unit in rural Vermont, Colorado, Arkansas, Virginia, or Mississippi than on the streets of New York, Boston, or Washington. Yet, the reality of a nuclear device being built in one of those rural areas and then transported to a major metropolitan area is an ever present danger.

America has to be constantly vigilant in all areas of the country and ensure that it doesn’t fall into the pre-September 11, 2001, paradigm of developing counter-terrorism plans and strategies on what “has” happened – historical data only. Rather planners should use the post-September 11, 2001 paradigm of what “could” happen - anticipation in conjunction with what has happened – historical data.

Our enemies are sophisticated, educated, cunning, and clever and must never be underestimated. “Yet some of the worst anti-Americanism among Muslim fundamentalists comes from people who are often remarkably well educated – engineers, doctors, and even scientists” (Emerson, 2002). Their, knowledge, skills and abilities were demonstrated on 9/11.

The nation’s planning and strategies for dealing with the post 9/11 threat of terrorism must be “out of the box”. Since 9/11, there needs to be a new “paradigm” for addressing terrorism if we as a nation hope to reduce the opportunities for terrorists to launch another attack on American soil.

“A paradigm is a set of rules and regulations (written or unwritten) that does two things: (1) it establishes or defines boundaries; and (2) it tells you how to behave inside those boundaries in order to be successful” (Barker, 1992,). The paradigm “boundaries” between many of the cultures that breed terrorism and the American culture differ greatly, e.g., in the American culture it is unacceptable

behavior, even considered to be criminal behavior, for people to become homicide / suicide bombers. However, in some cultures those who chose to become homicide/suicide bombers are considered to be heroes and martyrs.

After reading Barker's definition of a paradigm, it is easy to see that those individuals responsible for developing America's plans and strategies for dealing with today's terrorists need to ensure that their cultural paradigm (American) doesn't unduly influence the way they develop their plans and strategies. It is essential for the American planners and strategists to have a thorough understanding of the planning and strategies paradigms of the potential terrorists (Middle Eastern, Asian, Domestic, etc.) whose ultimate goal it is to destroy the American way of life.

It would be naive of Americans to think that both international and domestic terrorists have not identified specific areas in rural America to conduct their illicit and clandestine activities. Al Qaeda has a well established reputation for planning. "Another hallmark of an Al Qaeda attack is its huge investment in the planning and preparatory stages" (Rohan Gunaratna, 2002.).

Additionally, it's a well known fact that many domestic terrorists and criminal groups have located their operations in rural areas. Groups known for their far right, religious, and militia beliefs have long used that vastness of rural America to conceal their activities from local, state, and federal law enforcement. White supremacist and survivalist groups have been known to conduct military type training exercise in rural areas. One example is the now defunct Aryan Brotherhood whose headquarters was located in Hayden Lake, ID – (Kushner, 2003).

Planning to deal with today's rural terrorism is reminiscent of dealing with the rural drug trafficking of the late 1980s and 1990s. During that period of time, sophisticated drug dealers moved their production operations (speed, marijuana, crack-cocaine, etc) from the big cities to rural areas. Their rationale for their moves was simple-rural areas provide numerous advantages that large cities don't. The same rationale holds true for terrorists.

There are many attractive advantages for terrorists to locate their activities in rural areas of America but three crucial ones are:

1. Shortcomings in law enforcement and public safety operations
2. Isolation and Anonymity - Freedom of movement
3. Availability of locations – to meet their needs

Operational shortcomings in local law enforcement and public safety operations are one of the factors that would attract terrorists to rural areas. Rural law enforcement personnel lack the numbers in personnel, on-going training, up to date intelligence, and equipment that is required to be truly active participants in the war against terror. Although rural law enforcement agencies have the desire to be active participants (in the war on terrorism) and the nation certainly needs them to be active participants, they lack the necessary training on what to look for and how to "initially" respond to a terrorist event (s).

Another "real life" factor that must be addressed is the unspoken nemesis that haunts many law enforcement and public safety agencies, and that is the rivalry that exists between agencies. This

rivalry has existed for years and in some areas of the country has seriously influenced how agencies interacted with each other to the detriment of public safety. It would be foolish to think that the terrorists are not aware of these rivalries between law enforcement and public safety agencies. In fact, recent news stories have been detailing a rift between the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Rivalry aside, the two most significant operational issues, other than actual numbers of officers available, is the lack of continuous updated training and the time to practice the newly acquired skills. To defeat terrorists, all of the nation's law enforcement and other public safety personnel have to have the most up to date training possible. Ideally, there should be a minimum level of counter-terrorism "skills" training that every law enforcement officer and public safety person should be able to receive.

Unfortunately, most rural law enforcement and other public safety agencies do not have either the personnel or the funds to send their personnel to much of the training that is currently being offered. Some rural law enforcement and public safety agencies use both volunteers and part-time personnel to fill positions. For these people to go to "outside" training would mean that they would have to take time from their fulltime jobs and in some cases leaving their jurisdictions without law enforcement protections.

Training issues can be resolved by bringing the training to the people in rural America. This can be accomplished by using the World Wide Web to deliver intelligence training, cognitive skills, and video training sessions. The actual "skills" based "hands-on" training elements of the training must be delivered on-site so that the participants will have an opportunity to practice the skills under the watchful eyes of certified instructors.

The "what to look for" training presents a series of issues that will need to be addressed. The "what to look for" is difficult because it's always changing as the terrorists change their tactics and strategies. As the nation's counter-terrorism intelligence endeavors to become more attuned to how terrorists will manifest themselves in a rural setting, the more refined rural law enforcement and public safety agency counter measures will become. Also, as intelligence becomes available, it must be immediately transmitted to rural law enforcement and public safety agencies all over the country. Some basic things that rural law enforcement and public safety agencies can be on the look out for are:

- New people moving into an area
- Vehicles with out of state license plates
- Increase of traffic on "back roads"
- Increase of traffic at odd hours of the day
- Property rented by an agent for a third party
- Excessive purchases of materials that could be used to make bombs, chemical agents
- Purchase of laboratory type supplies and materials

- Late night, early morning vehicle movement
- Excessive purchases of printing materials and paper
- Excessive purchases of household items – garbage pails, metal and vinyl piping, propane tanks for outdoor grill's, etc.
- Be attentive to all people, not just those perceived to be from nations that breed terrorists
- Check motel registers, if permitted by state laws; run checks on vehicles parked in motel parking lots (match the vehicle with the plate)

Additionally, law enforcement and other public safety agencies also need very specific training in how to “initially” respond to a terrorist event (s). They will need to receive training in tactics that they could use if they are placed in the role of the initial first responders. Many of today’s terrorists, both international and domestic, have received military type training. Law enforcement and other first responder personnel need to be training in tactics that will assist them in surviving the initial contact with terrorists.

Other rural public service agencies (fire departments, ambulance squads, public health agencies, land fill employees) can also play an important role in maintaining constant vigilance and gathering intelligence. They also need to receive training in what to look for in a rural setting. Some of the things that they should look for are:

- Persons ill with a disease that could be suspicious (not common to that area of the country, caused by exposure to an agent not in the general mainstream and unexplainable skin burns).
- Persons having injuries that could be associated with military types of training – slashing cuts, burns, unusual fractures, etc.
- Botched or previous medical care for illness or injuries
- Observing the surroundings looking for things that don’t fit (various manuals, medical supplies, excessive number of vehicles, containers / drums of various agents or fuel, excessive propane tanks, fertilizer, etc.)
- Note the nationality, ages and genders of participants, occupants, etc. (General descriptions)

Rural America offers the isolation, anonymity, and freedom of movement that some terrorists need depending on their mission. An excerpt from a terrorist manual recovered by British police in a raid in London instructs the terrorists when to use cities and when to use rural areas.

## Definitions of Bases

“There are apartments, hiding places, command centers, etc. in which secret operations are executed against the enemy.

These bases may be in cities, and are [then] called homes or apartments. They may be in mountainous, harsh terrain far from the enemy, and are [then] called hiding places or bases.

During the initial stages, the Military Organization usually uses apartments in cities as places for launching assigned missions, such as collecting information, observing members of the ruling regime, etc.

Hiding places and bases in mountains and harsh terrain are used at later stages, from which Jihad [holy wars] groups are dispatched to execute assassination operations of enemy individuals, bomb their centers, and capture their weapons. In some Arab Countries such as Egypt, where there are no mountains or harsh terrain, all stages of Jihad work would take place in cities. The opposite was true in Afghanistan, where initially Jihad work was in the cities, then the warriors shifted to mountains and harsh Terrain... (IK/BM -24 Translation – Fourth Lesson Organization Military Bases “APARTMENT PLACES – HIDING” – Captured Terrorist Manual, 2002.)

The above excerpt clearly illustrates that terrorists have included rural areas in their overall planning, strategies, and tactics. Also this quote should reinforce the importance of including rural America in the nation’s overall counter-terrorism planning and funding. According to an article in the Sunday, July 18, 2004, New York Times, “The Central Intelligence Agency has begun a series of terrorism briefings for state and local law enforcement personnel, for the first time dispatching counterterrorism experts to cities and small towns to warn of the possibility of an attack by Al Qaeda this year, government officials said this week”. (Johnston and Jehl, 2004).

An argument can be made that as law enforcement, public safety, and intelligence agencies become more successful in developing their inroads to terrorist groups located in the cities, they [the terrorists], like drug manufacturers before them, will move more of their operations to rural America.

Rural America also has variety of targets ranging from symbolic, religious, civic, and patriotic, to integral elements of the nation’s physical and economic infrastructure. A few of these

infrastructure targets are large regional rural shopping malls and/or super stores, grain storage facilities, power grids, water supplies, food supplies, crops, livestock, and major gas lines (above and below ground).

A series of well planned and executed terrorist events against various elements of the nation's infrastructure that is located throughout rural America could have disastrous effects on the nation's economy, and more importantly, the national psyche.

Rural law enforcement and public safety agencies should identify potential terrorist targets and how they could try to prevent terrorist events, and/or respond to terrorist events should they take place. Their planning should be based on the "new paradigm using historical and anticipatory information". Since the incident in the Russian school, school bus routes, daycare centers for the young and the elderly, churches, hospitals, synagogues, etc. should also be considered targets and factored into their plans.

An integral part of any / all planning will be what additional resources will be needed should there be terrorist events. For additional resources in rural areas...help can be miles away, which means that the local rural law enforcement and public safety agencies will have to respond, engage and control the situation until help arrives. This is unlike large metropolitan areas where additional resources (trained personnel and equipment) are just minutes away.

Another important area that must be taken into account, when developing plans and strategies, is that the terrorists have a history of enacting multiple events simultaneously. If terrorists should use this tactic in rural America, it would seriously hamper agencies from assisting one another. Example: what if four adjacent rural counties had terrorist events happen simultaneously; how would that affect their emergency plans...furthermore, how would it affect the state's overall emergency plans and ability to respond?

To ensure that rural America is included in the government's overall counter-terrorism planning, it is crucial that adequate funding be dedicated for rural America. In developing budgetary spending plans for rural Homeland Security, it will be important to take into consideration the many differences between metropolitan Homeland security needs and rural Homeland security needs. One example of a major difference between metropolitan and rural Homeland security is communications. In many rural areas, radio communications are difficult and the back-up systems are not always reliable. For instance many rural areas still don't have cell phone coverage. Terrorists, as part of a larger event, could conceivably disable several counties, possibly even parts, if not all, of the states' communications systems.

An approach for ensuring that rural America gets the training it needs for Homeland Security is to develop "regional experts". "Regional experts" would be highly trained personnel in specific areas such as Hazmat, close-in combat tactics, surveillance techniques, high risk raids, perimeter security techniques, etc. They would also have the most up-to-date equipment that they would use to respond to a terrorist event (s). By using "regional experts", rural America will have experts in various fields throughout the country. It is impractical and cost ineffective to try to equip every rural law enforcement or public safety agency with every new piece of equipment and intensive training necessary to defeat terrorism.

The “regional experts” would also be responsible for training other law enforcement personnel in their “surrounding” areas in the basics of their “specialties”. They would bring the “hands-on” practical skills to rural departments. They would also be available to respond to terrorist events to augment and/or take over a terrorist situation. The World Wide Web could be used to train law enforcement and other public safety personnel in the cognitive skills necessary to stay up to date with Homeland Security Issues.

For the “regional experts” concept to work, inter-agency rivalries and professional jealousy will have to be set-aside. It is conceivable that a small police department could become the “regional expert” for rough terrain surveillance or perimeter security and that the state police could become “regional experts” for counter-sniper operations. The goal is to have personnel in rural areas across America who is trained to identify potential terrorist activities and respond to terrorist events should they happen in their area.

Protecting rural America should carry the same amount of urgency and importance as metropolitan America. It will take some time to develop the plans, training, and personnel necessary to put rural America on the same level as metropolitan America, but it has to be done. The consequence for not addressing the issues in rural America could be a 9/11 event targeting rural America and the psychological devastation could be far more reaching in terms of the national economy and psyche.

Abraham Lincoln, in his Annual Message to Congress (December 1, 1862), gives us a clear direction for the post 9/11 world. “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew.”

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