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## INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY

# Exercise shows NPPs not good terrorist targets

**A**N EXERCISE SIMULATING an emergency meeting of the National Security Council at Camp David explored the difficulties of coping with credible warnings of a terrorist attack in the United States. The wild card was that the simulation's role players—who acted as U.S. President, secretary of homeland security, energy secretary, attorney general, national security adviser, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and as heads of other governmental organizations—had insufficient information to plan for effective prevention. While role players initially were concerned about attacks on nuclear power plants, they came to realize that other facilities, such as chemical plants, were more vulnerable and likely terrorist targets.

The exercise, called “Silent Vector,” was held on October 17–18 at Andrews Air Force Base, located about 10 miles southeast of Washington, D.C., in Prince Georges County, Md. Silent Vector was developed and produced by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in partnership with the Anser Institute for Homeland Security and the Oklahoma City National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism.

Key role players included former Senator Sam Nunn as the president, former en-

*The difficulties of coping with credible warnings of a terrorist attack were explored in a simulated National Security Council meeting.*

ergy secretary Charles Curtis playing the same simulated role, and former CIA director James Woolsey as national security adviser. Other role players included Shirley Ann Jackson, former chairwoman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission; James Lee Witt, former head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency; and Dee Dee Myers, former White House spokesperson under President Bill Clinton.

Role players had no knowledge of types of targets or modes of attack at the beginning of the exercise, except that credible warnings indicated that attack was imminent against energy and energy-related infrastructure on the East Coast. As the exercise began, simulated intelligence reports were vague and conflicting, but as hours went by the reports became more specific, revealing greater amounts of information. The possible targets included nuclear power plants, refineries, large natural gas and propane gas storage facilities, pipeline infrastructure, petroleum terminals, chemical operations, and dams.

The intelligence reports determined that multiple attacks were likely to occur and terrorist attack teams were likely already in place somewhere on the East Coast. As the exercise unfolded, the role players ordered protective steps for key facilities and infrastructure, and set a future date for a press conference. But word of the possible attacks leaked out as a result of the protective measures taken, and communities predisposed to panic (such as “those with nuclear power plants,” according to Anser) assumed the worst-case scenario.

Ultimately, however, the role players realized that nuclear plants were unattractive targets. That conflicted with general observations made by exercise organizers in the months leading up to the exercise. According to Dave McIntyre, deputy director of Anser, the organizers had assumed that terrorists would want to attack nuclear plants because of three reasons: vulnerability of a nuclear plant, potential effects, and public panic.

That assumption would be wrong, McIntyre revealed. Terrorists “would be mistak-

en about [nuclear plants' vulnerability and the potential effects of an attack]," he stated. "That is, [while news of a potential attack on a nuclear plant] might stir up public concern . . . protection of the plants has improved to the point that they are difficult targets to seriously impact."

McIntyre commented that while nuclear plant security does not bring the risk/consequences of an attack to zero, it does mean that "there are many more vulnerable, more attractive targets in the United States. I concluded that I would not go [for a nuclear plant as] a target if I were a terrorist."

During the exercise, the role players came to that same conclusion, McIntyre said. "They started out very concerned, [but] ended focused on other issues," he said. For example, chemical plants were seen as much more vulnerable to terrorist attack because of lesser security measures in place.

McIntyre stressed, however, that the exercise highlighted the necessity of informing the public about nuclear plant security/safety (both before and during an emergency) because the risk of the media "hyping a low-level danger into an uncontrolled public evacuation is significant," he said.

Philip Anderson, CSI's director of the Homeland Security Initiative, added that the potential panic by those living near nuclear plants would be something that the nation's senior leadership would have to address. "For instance," Anderson pondered, "will the public believe that nuclear power plants are far less likely to be targeted than chemical operations or refineries? I'm not sure."

Anderson said it was important to remember that nuclear plants are not without risk from all forms of attack. Nuclear plants "remain vulnerable to heavy aircraft," he said, "probably not passenger airliners, but air freight and air charter." This was one of the reasons why the president (Sam Nunn) grounded general aviation (including air freight/charter) during the exercise.

Ultimately, the exercise played out so that no attack had taken place, leaving the role players to contemplate whether the attack was foiled (such as by luck, i.e., fortu-

itous arrest of one terrorist, or by the grounding of general aviation), was deterred, or was a hoax.

A post-exercise analysis revealed nine key lessons learned:

1. *When governments can't say what is happening, rumors are accepted as facts.*

—Government resists reporting what it does not know.

—Communities primed for panic may assume the worst case scenario.

—News media will attempt to create coherence, even when there is none.

2. *(Central dilemma) Reacting to ambiguous warning is essential but helps terrorists achieve goals.*

—Actual terrorist target may be to damage the U.S. economy.

—Protective steps against uncertain threats may cause widespread economic disruption.

—Government action may effectively implement terrorist goals.

3. *Relaxing protective measures is more difficult than imposing them.*

—Leaders likely will take dramatic steps to block terrorists when warning becomes more credible.

—If steps are effective, the attack won't occur.

—Silence creates an ambiguous situation.

—Was the attack successfully blunted or was it a hoax?

—Was the attack disrupted or was this a preset pause in the terrorist plan?

—When is it safe to return to normal life?

4. *How can 20 years of economic disruption be avoided in the United States?*

—It is relatively easy for terrorists to create a credible threat.

—Government leaders cannot ignore a credible threat.

—How does the United States avoid "cheap" terrorism (which cultivates a reaction by the nation), which achieves terrorist goals?

—The United States needs a 20-year strategy, not a one-time strategy.

5. *Intelligence no longer falls into "foreign" and "domestic" categories.*

—Modern terrorism is trans-border.

—America's intelligence operations are

border-bound.

—Coordination has improved, but it is still inadequate.

—The new Department of Homeland Security will have difficulty fixing the problem.

6. *The current Homeland Security Alerting System does not translate well to the private sector.*

—The federal government's color-coded system works only for the federal government.

—The system is not directive to state and local governments.

—There are different alerting concepts in different jurisdictions.

—Preparations are entirely voluntary for the private sector.

—There is no effective "report-back" system beyond the federal response.

7. *Aviation security remains a problem.*

—While there has been progress in commercial passenger aviation, there is less security improvement in general aviation.

—Additional security improvements for air cargo/air charter operations are required.

8. *The chemical industry is a key area of concern.*

—There is a wide use of chemicals in American industry/society.

—Security procedures are not necessarily designed for terrorism.

—The chemical industry has a very complex control problem, using multiple producers.

—There are multiple transportation methods.

—There are widely distributed storage locations controlled by many different public and private organizations.

9. *Federal-state government interface is insufficient.*

—State/local governments are an indispensable element of response to terrorism.

—There is a widespread misunderstanding between federal and state/local levels of government.

—The current communication channels are insufficient for serious crisis.

—There is a need for a "classification" system to share sensitive information.

—Communication is key, especially with the public.