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## DOD and Consequence Management:

### Mitigating the Effects of Chemical and Biological Attack

by Rebecca Hersman and W. Seth Carus

#### Conclusions

- The threat of chemical and biological weapons attack against U.S. forces and population centers, as well as those of our allies, is real and growing. Mitigating the effects of such an attack--consequence management--is an essential part of responding to the threat.
- Many state and local governments have improved their capabilities to deal with this challenge. While progress is being made at the federal level, several departments and agencies, including the Department of Defense (DOD), are struggling to develop and coordinate effective responses.
- DOD organization, planning, and funding for consequence management fail to reflect the complexity of today's security environment, including: the potential for asymmetric warfare, the vulnerability of military facilities at home and abroad, and the indiscriminate character of chemical and biological weapons when used against military facilities near civilian population centers.
- Within DOD, effective consequence management is constrained by the presence of arbitrary conceptual and organizational divisions that inadequately define the response according to the nature, location, and target of the attack.
- The lack of an integrated DOD approach to many similar and overlapping consequence management activities involving the same resources and units contributes to poorly-defined mission requirements, organizational confusion, and inefficient resource allocation.
- These problems lead to unrealistic planning assumptions regarding the ability of DOD to conduct overseas operations in case of a major chemical or biological attack in the United States.

#### Planning for the Unthinkable

Many analysts believe that the use of chemical and biological weapons (CBW) by terrorists or rogue states against the United States is probable. Underlying this concern is the growing realization that traditional deterrence--and especially fear of massive retaliation--is less reliable against such threats.

Nonstate actors may feel immune from a retaliatory response, while rogue states may believe that the benefits of using CBW outweigh the potential risks--especially if they can avoid attribution. U.S. policymakers must plan for and prepare to deal with the consequences of such an attack.

Domestically, primary responsibility for consequence management lies with local and state authorities. Yet, federal support, from medical care to remediation, will also be critical. For this reason, the government is devoting substantial attention and resources to developing an efficient federal response that draws on the capabilities of all relevant departments and agencies, including: DOD, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

### **The DOD Role**

Because of its specialized expertise, the 1996 Nunn-Lugar-Domenici legislation directed the DOD to develop the Domestic Preparedness Program to provide consequence management training in 120 cities for first responders, such as police and emergency personnel. Although the program is being transferred to the Justice Department, expectations about DOD involvement in domestic consequence management remain high. Because DOD possesses unique chemical and biological defense assets, as well as substantial medical, security, and logistics capabilities, it is likely to be an important component of the overall federal response. For this reason, DOD established a new Joint Task Force for Civil Support (JTF-CS) in October 1999 as part of the Joint Forces Command organized to replace Atlantic Command. The JTF-CS will control military resources supporting the lead federal agencies in responding to a domestic terrorist incident involving CBW. In addition, a new position in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Civil Support (ATSD-CS), has been created to provide civilian oversight.

Unfortunately, other consequence management responsibilities have received far less attention. For most of the federal community, consequence management applies solely to the terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). DOD, however, has many similar and overlapping requirements, including military support for civil authorities, force protection, and battlefield response, all of which depend upon the same limited set of response assets and capabilities. DOD must also be concerned about a wide range of CBW uses, including attacks against military facilities at home and abroad, and against U.S. combat forces and coalition partners, which could undermine the core military mission.

DOD lacks an internal consensus on the scope and nature of its consequence management role and the relationship of consequence management to other missions and responsibilities. Multiple organizations in the Office of the Secretary of Defense share responsibility for various consequence management activities with several regional and functional commands. Poor communication and conflicting priorities within DOD have made its consequence management activities difficult to coordinate and nearly impossible to integrate. In addition, the inability to properly scope and identify consequence management responsibilities significantly impedes effective allocation of assets and resources. Some DOD investments in domestic consequence management duplicate federal, state, or local capabilities, while other requirements receive insufficient attention.

## **The Compartmentalization Problem**

Conceptual and organizational compartmentalization hinders efforts to develop a more integrated approach to consequence management. Currently, DOD consequence management responses are determined largely by the nature of the attack (terrorist action or act of war), the location of the attack (domestic or overseas), and the target of the attack (civilian or military). Unfortunately, these divisions are inconsistent with emerging concepts of asymmetric warfare and adversary use of CBW.

### ***Nature of the Attack--Terrorism or Warfare***

Consequence management roles within DOD vary depending on whether the attack is a terrorist event or an act of war. Yet, the distinction between terrorist and military use of CBW is increasingly problematic. State adversaries, perhaps acting through terrorist surrogates, may be inclined to use chemical and biological weapons early, unconventionally, and, if possible, anonymously. They may use CBW against such military targets as ports, airfields, staging areas, and overseas bases to prepare the military battlefield by slowing U.S. logistics and power projection. Similarly, they may psychologically undermine public support or politically divide a coalition for an operation by attacking domestic or allied civilian targets. Eager to deter U.S. regional involvement while avoiding an overwhelming retaliatory response, perpetrators may try to obscure their identity. Under these circumstances, the line between terrorism and asymmetric warfare may be vanishingly thin.

The stealthy qualities of biological weapons further complicate the distinction between terrorism and war. An adversary with effective agent dissemination capabilities could employ biological weapons as part of a covert attack nearly impossible to detect until casualties appear. Depending on the agent used, the United States might not know if an outbreak were natural, a terrorist attack, or the opening assault of a war.

For all the legitimate concern about biological terrorism, biological weapons are still difficult to employ effectively without access to state-developed technology. Rogue states and well-financed terrorists with access to state-developed technology remain the most serious danger from the effective, large-scale use of biological weapons.

### ***Site of the Attack--Domestic or Overseas***

By focusing on domestic incidents, most consequence management initiatives reflect a neglect of, or a lack of understanding about, asymmetric threats. Regional adversaries could use WMD to attack U.S. vulnerabilities globally, projecting a conflict out of their backyards and into ours. Yet, while the U.S. homeland is no longer a sanctuary, neither is it the only potential target. U.S. forces and facilities overseas remain vulnerable to attack. In addition, attacks on the civilians or support infrastructure of host nations or coalition partners could halt U.S. regional operations. Overseas consequence management can, therefore, be essential to the core defense mission.

The consequence management capabilities of likely coalition partners and host governments are limited; none are prepared to deal with a large-scale attack. After an attack, U.S.-based assets and

personnel could take days to arrive on the scene, possibly too late to be of assistance. In light of these challenges, enhanced consequence management capabilities may be critical for coalition maintenance. As a result, the United States may have to deploy additional specialized CBW and medical assets in the earliest stages of a crisis to sustain coalition support. Yet, the United States cannot provide extensive consequence management assistance to host nations without limiting its ability to protect American forces and facilities or diminishing its ability to respond to a domestic attack.

### ***Responsibility--Civilian or Military***

Arbitrary distinctions between civilian and military targets and responses also complicate consequence management. Appropriately, civil authorities have the lead for domestic consequence management. It is less clear who should be in charge if military facilities and forces are affected. A CBW attack on U.S. forces preparing to deploy overseas in support of a contingency operation could affect warfighting capabilities and create tensions between civilian and military responders with conflicting priorities. For example, the military could focus on deploying forces to the theater of operations, while civil authorities may be more concerned about providing medical care, protecting the crime scene, and apprehending perpetrators.

In reality, all chemical and biological attacks are likely to require an integrated response involving both military and civilian communities. A large-scale CBW attack on a military target is almost certain to have considerable collateral effects on civilians. Moreover, if contagious biological agents are used, the effects could quickly extend beyond those immediately targeted.

Finally, considerable chemical and biological expertise exists outside DOD--especially for agents that might be used in terrorist-style attacks but are thought to have limited military utility. In the event such agents are used, DOD may find that it needs this civilian expertise. Similarly, while participating in consequence management operations overseas, even under a State Department lead, DOD is likely to work closely with nongovernmental relief and medical organizations and international agencies, especially the World Health Organization.

### **Redefining DOD Consequence Management**

DOD has a long history of supporting civil authorities in response to natural disasters and, more recently, conventional bombings. Traditionally, support is provided only if requested and only if it does not detract from other missions, especially warfighting. Defense planners generally assume that the warfighting mission will have priority. This approach has worked because events have been isolated and overall force requirements have been low.

The magnitude of a chemical or biological event, however, could outstrip that of natural disasters or conventional terrorism, generating enormous requirements for military assets that may be either in high demand or vital to the rapid response capability of the Armed Forces. Capabilities suitable for consequence management, such as medical units or transportation assets, already support numerous military missions at home and abroad. They also can take days or weeks to deploy. Those units that can react quickly are designed to support contingency operations. Using them to support domestic

consequence management would reduce military readiness. Even a relatively small attack could create enormous political and psychological pressures to use specialized assets without regard to the implications for overseas operations. Once deployed domestically, DOD may find it impossible to reclaim consequence management assets, if they are needed for overseas contingencies.

It cannot be assumed that domestic and overseas events will be isolated. Terrorist attacks are more likely to occur when regional tensions are high and U.S. forces are engaged or on alert. If such an attack is part of an asymmetrical strategy by a hostile state, then multiple, near simultaneous events in different locations could pose a serious threat. Even an isolated terrorist incident could have a profound operational impact on a larger military campaign. A large-scale, domestic, terrorist attack could tie up military assets and create an advantage for a regional adversary. Committing significant defense resources to assist in a domestic crisis could severely impair American ability to fight one major theater war, let alone two.

By establishing both the JTF-CS and ATSD-CS, the department has taken an important step toward recognizing that traditional methods and practices are inadequate in the face of a CBW terrorist attack against the United States. This step, however, is not enough. The department must expand its view of consequence management in several ways. First, it needs to discard flawed planning assumptions. Assuming that defense assets would continue to support overseas operations in the face of a large-scale, domestic attack is unrealistic. A major event could quickly absorb many active duty medical, transportation, and specialized WMD assets, reducing the capability to fight and win even one major regional war. Yet, because current planning assumes that civil support activities will not compete with warfighting requirements, the effects of a large-scale CBW domestic attack on military operations have gone virtually unstudied.

Second, DOD cannot allow the growing emphasis on domestic civilian response to obscure the vulnerability of U.S. forces and facilities to chemical and biological attack. Many U.S. military facilities at home and abroad are not well prepared--some lag behind their civilian counterparts in planning and preparedness. Host countries and allies often have only rudimentary consequence management capabilities, sometimes putting deployed U.S. forces at risk. In addition, war plans often rely on host nation workers who may be unwilling to remain on the job in the face of chemical or biological threats. Moreover, military medical capabilities are not configured to provide mass casualty treatment, such as acute respiratory care, for those exposed to biological or chemical agents.

Finally, DOD cannot rely on an arbitrary, ad hoc process to ensure the proper allocation of limited consequence management capabilities among competing priorities. Deciding how to allocate resources among domestic terrorism, support for vital allies and coalition partners, and protection of U.S. forces involves difficult choices. Domestic deployments are likely to diminish the ability to respond quickly to events overseas. Overseas deployments of key military assets could diminish domestic readiness for a terrorist incident within the United States. No mechanism, short of the President, exists to evaluate competing demands and to arbitrate among priorities in the face of a multifaceted, multi-event crisis. The allocation of consequence management assets should not be handled on a first-come, first-served basis, but should be based on an understanding of the tradeoffs among competing demands.

## Recommendations

DOD should consider the following actions:

- Integrate consequence management requirements to recognize similar but competing missions for the same resources and units.
- Examine consequence management responses under more stressful scenarios, including multiple events in geographically dispersed areas against varied targets, or terrorist attacks in conjunction with a major theater war.
- Promote greater alignment of DOD responsibilities and requirements in consequence management (usually underestimated), and available assets or capabilities (usually overestimated).
- Develop appropriate organizational structures that provide sufficient civilian and military oversight and provide a mechanism to deconflict competing demands for limited assets. These structures should focus on function, priority, and the availability of alternatives.
- Recognize the significant force structure and strategy implications of large-scale DOD participation in domestic consequence management and address these implications in the next quadrennial defense review.
- Reduce DOD consequence management operational requirements by helping allies and coalition partners, as well as state and local communities, improve their capabilities to conduct consequence management.

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