

Testimony of

Major General Robert T. Bray

Adjutant General, State of Rhode Island and

Commanding General, Rhode Island National Guard

before the

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Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology

"Emerging Biological Threats and Public Health Preparedness: Getting Beyond Getting Ready"

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Mr. Chairman, committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding National Guard planning and preparations to address emerging biological threats.

It is expected that in the event of a biological incident such as pandemic influenza, the entire United States will be affected within a matter of days. The impact will likely affect all dimensions of our national infrastructure. In addition to actions at the local, state, and federal government level in a coordinated response to the needs of the public it should be noted that private sector resources will be expected and needed. Included in a response to a biological incident will be the National Guard of each state in concert with the Department of Defense (DoD) and other federal agencies in both a Title 32 and Title 10 capacity.

Introduction

As always by law, the National Guard's primary mission is support to local authorities in a domestic crisis. The National Guard is not intended to be a first responder or the lead agency for any emergency response effort. The National Guard will nevertheless be pro-active in providing support through training, preparation and planning. The close relationship, in the State of Rhode Island, between the Director of Military Support and the Emergency Management Agency through the Rhode Island National Guard Joint Operation Center and the State Emergency Operation Center under the organization of the Office of the Adjutant General facilitates the constant situational awareness required to alert and mobilize the National Guard in a timely manner.

Presently, the Rhode Island National Guard Joint Operation Center is minimally staffed for 24/7/365 operation. The State Emergency Operation Center is presently staffed during regular business hours with a "call service" during other hours to key personnel, unless an anticipated situation demands that we implement 24 hour staffing. A model for merging the capabilities between the two entities to ensure a 24/7/365 staffing of a single Joint Interagency Coordination Center for full situational awareness toward a statewide common operating picture is being prepared for consideration. The limitations of facilities, personnel, funding, and statutes impede progress toward this necessary organization in support of the Homeland Security domestic response.

The National Guard Bureau (NGB) and by extension the Rhode Island National Guard, is committed to the fundamental principle that each and every state and territory must possess ten core capabilities for homeland readiness. Amidst the most extensive transformation of our Army and Air Forces in decades, the National Guard intends that every governor has each of these "essential 10" capabilities:

- A Joint Force Headquarters for command and control
- A Civil Support Team for chemical, biological, and radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosive (CBRNE) detection
- Engineering assets
- Communications capability
- Ground transportation
- Aviation
- Medical capability
- Security forces
- Logistics and maintenance capability

A Rhode Island National Guard Perspective

The Rhode Island National Guard possesses all of these capabilities in the following organization:

- A Joint Force Headquarters for command and control located at the Command Readiness Center in Cranston, Rhode Island under the command of a Brigadier General.
- The Civil Support Team for chemical, biological, and radiological detection, nuclear or high-yield explosive (CBRNE) mission is assigned to the Rhode Island National Guard's 13th Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Civil Support Team (CST) located in Coventry, Rhode Island.
- Engineering assets are provided by the 861st Engineer Company located in East Greenwich, Rhode Island and the 143d Civil Engineering Squadron in North Kingstown, Rhode Island.
- Communications provided by the 281st Combat Communications Group and 282nd Combat Communications Squadron located in North Smithfield, Rhode Island.
- Ground transportation capability is supported by all the organic units of the Rhode Island Army and Air National Guard with HUMMWV and medium truck assets.
- Aviation supported is provided by the 143rd Airlift Wing and the 1/126th Army Aviation Battalion located at Quonset Point, Rhode Island.
- Medical capability is limited through the Rhode Island Army National Guard Medical Command, the 143d Air Wing Medical Group and unit assigned medical personnel.
- Security forces are supported by the 43rd Military Police Brigade located in Warwick, the 143d Security Forces Squadron in North Kingstown and through the detail of the Quick Reaction Force.
- Logistics and maintenance capability is supported by the United States Property Book Office located in Providence, Rhode Island and the Combined Support Maintenance Facility, as well as the Forward Support Company of the 1/103rd Field Artillery Battalion.

The primary National Guard asset, in Rhode Island, to assist local authorities with their response to a biological incident is the Rhode Island National Guard 13th Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Civil Support Team (CST). The CST is an operational, state based, full-time unit specifically designed to assist local authorities in the event of a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or high-yield explosive (CBRNE) incident. The team is available 24/7 and located centrally within the state at the Coventry Air National Guard Station and is able to respond to a request by civil authorities within 60 to 90 minutes. The CST maintains a close working relationship with first response agencies, including the Hazardous Material Response units in the state as well as with the CST units of the other states for assistance.

In the event of a biological incident, we anticipate that in addition to the 13th CST, civil authorities will request personnel, transportation and communications support to augment their response efforts. Additionally, the CBRNE Enhanced Response Force Package (CERF-P) and the CBRNE Consequence Management Response Force (CCMRF) are two national assets supported by the National Guard and the Department of Defense designed to provide regional support for a catastrophic homeland event.

As of July 15, 2008 the assigned strength of the RING was 3,274 soldiers and airmen (2107 Army National Guard and 1167 Air National Guard). Mobilizations and training requirements reduce the amount of available personnel who are able to support domestic operations.

As of July 15, 2008 71% (2327 soldiers and airmen) were available to support domestic operations if requested by civil authorities. This figure exceeds the threshold goal established by the Chief, National Guard Bureau when he ensured Governors that his goal was to maintain a minimum of 50% of a state's personnel and equipment in the state to respond to domestic incidents in support of civil authorities. We anticipate that civil authorities will request personnel to conduct security, logistics, transportation, and communications operations.

In the planning process, we make the assumption that that individuals currently assigned to the RING and working in civilian health care, police, emergency medical service and fire professions will not be available for mobilization with the Rhode Island National Guard. The limited medical assets within the Rhode Island National Guard's current force structure will primarily support the medical needs of service members activated to conduct domestic support operations.

The current force structure and projected force structure provides sufficient resources to conduct security and logistic operations. We anticipate that civil authorities will request personnel to man traffic control check points and establish area security. Our military police, security forces and other units provide the RING with sufficient capability to accomplish these operations. Additionally, we anticipate that civil authorities will require National Guard support to move supplies and manage points of distribution. Current personnel levels and the transportation assets described below provide sufficient capabilities to conduct these operational tasks.

The RING maintains a variety of transportation assets which include wheeled vehicles, helicopters and fixed wing aircraft. These assets provide civil authorities with a capability to move personnel, supplies and equipment to critical areas. Additionally, the airstrip at the Quonset Air National Guard Base provides civil authorities with an alternate port of embarkation/debarkation for resources transiting in and out of Rhode Island.

Communications assets within the RING provide a valuable capability to civil authorities. In addition to those assets assigned the 13th CST, the Joint Command, Control, Communications, and Computer (J4) Coordination Center, which is commonly referred to, as the JCCC is located in North Smithfield, Rhode Island. The JCCC is a sub-component of the Joint CONUS Communications Support Environment (JCCSE). The JCCC assists in maintaining situational awareness, planning, and coordination during homeland defense and civil support operations. The JCCC serves as a single control agency for the management and direction of the joint force command, control, communications, and computer systems. Rhode Island also has the capability of another component of the JCCSE which is the Joint Incident Site Communications Capability (JISCC). The JISCC is a satellite package that can be towed or airlifted to an incident site. It contains communications assets that can communicate via high-frequency radio, telephone, video and satellites to interface a variety of communications equipment used by first responders, state, and federal agencies and can be operational within 90 minutes upon arrival at the incident site. Additionally, the NGB has the capability to deploy a Joint Enabling Team (JET) to the state. JETs assists in the collection, reporting and sharing of information in order to identify potential response needs, coordinate the response, and facilitate the support requested by civil authorities.

Partnering with Stakeholders

While the RING has sufficient capabilities to support civil authorities in the event of a biological incident or other domestic support operation we recognize the changing nature of the security environment. We recognize that gaps may exist between our capabilities and those needed by civil authorities. As we identify challenges and opportunities we continuously engage our strategic partners. For example, in an effort to engage our Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) and other strategic partners within FEMA Region I, we recently hosted the Regional Interagency Steering Committee (RISC) conference.

The RING, specifically the 13th CST, is currently partnering across all sectors of the state in the areas of planning, training, and response thereby increasing the state's ability to respond to incidents of national significance. We are currently experiencing tremendous success at the second tier response level (state level) and have established partnerships with a myriad of state agencies and federal agencies to include;

- RI Emergency Management Agency
- RI Department of Health
- RI Department of Environmental Management,
- Rhode Island State Weapons of Mass Destruction Tactical Team (RI-WMD-TT)
- RI regional HAZMAT teams
- RI regional DECON teams
- RI HAZMAT Working Group
- RI Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT)
- RI State Police Fusion Center
- U.S. Attorney's Office Anti-Terrorism Advisory Council
- Newport Naval WMD Decontamination Team
- Boston FBI Office, CBRNE Division, Hazardous Response Team
- US Army North
- Northern Command
- National Guard Bureau
- FEMA Region I

Current examples of joint training conducted with these partners include the RING's recent hosting of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) CST Radiological Response Course, and the 13th CST Advanced Chemical Special Topics Laboratory Scale Preparation of Field Expedient and Improvised Chemical Weapons with Hazard Assessment Laboratory. In addition, the Rhode Island National Guard conducted numerous regional training exercises focused on support to civil authorities during which we exercised our collective response capabilities to include our National Guard Response Force (NGRF), WMD CST, Joint Operations Center (JOC) and Joint Incident Site Communication Capability (JISCC). Ongoing initiatives include participation in the Ingestion Pathway Response Plan Annual Review, CST Critical Facilities Informational Site Packets, the development of tabletop and situational training exercises with the Providence Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI), Transportation Security Administration (TSA), Army North (ARNORTH) and U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM). Additionally, three out of the four General Officers currently assigned to the National Guard are trained and certified as Joint Title 10 and Title 32 Task Force Commanders for domestic operations.

TAG Duties, Roles, and Responsibilities

The duties, roles, and responsibilities of my position in the state create a positive environment for partnerships and cooperation. In addition to my duties, roles and responsibilities as The Adjutant General of Rhode Island and the Commanding General of the Rhode Island National Guard, I also serve as the Homeland Security Advisor for the State of Rhode Island and the Director of the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency. This unique management structure provides one focal point for the Governor, as well as for the Federal agencies. Additionally, it helps to ensure a common direction for all stakeholders. Clearly defined goals and objectives facilitate a unity of effort, common operating picture and situational awareness.

Conclusion

Clearly the Rhode Island National Guard provides the State of Rhode Island with robust all hazard capability as well as for biological incidents. All is not perfect to be sure. At the core of capability is the need for clearly defined roles, missions, and responsibilities. The default for response should not be the National Guard due to a lack of capability at the local response level. Therefore, local, state, and federal funding is essential for adequate personnel, equipment, training, facilities, and planning. As an operational war fighting organization, the Rhode Island National Guard must be properly resourced. The Rhode Island National Guard is an operational force. It is an all-hazard, full-spectrum force engaged today in combating terrorism, war fighting, and domestic support. The Rhode Island National Guard needs 100% full time manning, 100% of TO&E equipment, state and federal support for our military construction budget, and full funding of its operational and maintenance budget. Consequently, I support the National Governors Association (NGA) letter to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House and Senate Committees on Armed Services, which opposes House amendments to the federal Insurrection Act. If enacted as part of the 2009 National Defense Authorization Act, these provisions would empower the President to order military Reserve components other than the National Guard to Title 10 duty for domestic missions, including natural disasters and emergencies for which states qualify for federal funding under the Robert T. Stafford Act.

In closing, planning, preparing, resourcing, and responding to a biological threat or other domestic incident is a continual process that must adapt to a complex and changing security environment. The role and mission of the National Guard under the command and control of The Adjutant General with the Governor as Commander in Chief, past, present, and future is essential to the success of domestic preparedness and response. Partnerships and resources at both the state and federal level are vital in our efforts to ensure that we stand Ready, Relevant Reliable, and Accessible in support of civil authorities in the event of a biological or other domestic incident.

Supplemental Data Sheet

Major General Robert T. Bray
Adjutant General of Rhode Island and
Commanding General Rhode Island National Guard
Joint Force Headquarters Rhode Island
645 New London Avenue
Cranston, Rhode Island 02920-3097
(401) 275-4102 or 275-4103

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