

B430. "Our Unfinished Post-9/11 Duty" The Christian Science Monitor (September 11, 2003) p. 9. Also published as "How Secure Is Our Homeland?," in Desert Morning News (Utah) (September 14, 2003) p. AA03.

Two years have passed without a new attack on our homeland, and Americans are increasingly complacent. They grumble much more about new travel procedures ("You have to keep your suitcases unlocked.") and intrusions into their privacy ("Cameras all over the place.") than about the lack of substantive security measures we should have - but have not - introduced.

Attorney General John Ashcroft must run around the country justifying what he did, rather than Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge explaining what he did not do.

Remember: It took eight years between the first attack on the World Trade Center and the second one, which caused 500 times the casualties. It may take Al Qaeda another eight years - careful planners that they are - before they strike again, but with our lack of preparedness, the next time the damage could well be even greater.

A quote from the Irish Republican Army is used in the book "Living Terrors," by Michael T. Osterholm and John Schwartz, and it sums up the problem we face: "You have to be lucky all the time - we have to be lucky just once."

Take heed. The odds favor the terrorists.

We are twice involved: personally and as citizens. Personally, few have joined the new citizen corps designed to assist authorities in case of another attack. Not many have even worked out an emergency-contact system for their immediate family: Where to meet, who will pick up the kids, and so on. Buying emergency provisions for home such as a battery-operated radios is still on too many to-do lists - even after the recent blackout.

As citizens we have not prodded the government to do what must be done.

Take, for example, shipping containers. Each year, 6 million large containers - large enough to conceal a nuclear weapon and a whole company of terrorists - enter the US by ship. While there are requirements now to X-ray or otherwise inspect every suitcase or carry-on before boarding a plane, only about 4 percent of the containers entering the country are checked - sort of. Some are X-rayed, but because X-rays are often misleading, suspicious containers must be unpacked, which is costly and time consuming. Often it's not done.

Much has been made of the creation of a whole new cabinet-level department to provide homeland security. Actually, so far, this has largely meant that various previously existing agencies have been given a new shared department name. The Department of Homeland Security is supposed to improve coordination among the various units entrusted with our security, but it does not include the Department of Defense, the CIA, the FBI, or the National Security Agency.

Coordination among these agencies has improved somewhat since Sept. 11. But there are still lots of turf battles and fights over budget allocations. A new Terrorist Threat Integration Center (TTIC) has been created. Here, all the "dots" are supposed to be connected to avoid another pre-Sept. 11 situation in which vital information was left disassembled in the bowels of various intelligence agencies. The new center, though, has next to no staff of its own; it relies on people detailed from various agencies. Those "detailed," not surprisingly, often turn

out to be those whom the agencies didn't want to keep. Moreover, information provided to the center by one agency can't be shared with another - without specific permission. When I heard how the center was to work, I was almost prompted to rush out to buy duct tape and vinyl sheeting. By all indications, our plethora of agencies isn't ready to work as a unified antiterrorism team.

And then there's the US driver's license - the most common way to identify people. Before Sept. 11, false and counterfeit licenses were very easy to obtain. (Seven of the Sept. 11 hijackers obtained Virginia driver's licenses.) Today, the counterfeit market still flourishes. Here in Washington, fake driver's licenses can be easily bought for \$100.

More is at stake than keeping people who are on some FBI list off airplanes. Driver's licenses may also be used to enter the US from the Western Hemisphere by people who claim to be American citizens. Agents of the Government Accounting Office conducting an investigation for Congress used counterfeit driver's licenses to enter the US from Canada, Mexico, Barbados, and Jamaica without being caught even once.

If there's another attack, a new RAND Corporation study shows, our so-called "first responders" - police, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) - are still not properly prepared to deal with the kind of challenges we faced on Sept. 11. Communication devices used by the various services are still often incompatible. The study also found numerous deficiencies in the protective gear available to those who risk their lives to save others. For example, gear available to EMTs is designed for hospital use and works poorly when used in the field.

And I'm just warming up. As the recent Northeastern blackout reminded us, our energy systems are very vulnerable to disruption. In general, plans to "harden" targets, from water supplies to nuclear power plant domes to telecommunication networks, haven't made much progress.

The list of ill preparedness goes on, but the picture is clear: We have a long way to go. Everyone realizes that foolproof protection is impossible. Even if you believe that another attack is unlikely, we should equip ourselves just in case. Moreover, many of the measures that ought to be taken would serve other purposes - from dealing with natural disasters to making us better citizens.

It isn't that progress hasn't been made, but it is way too early to let our guard down.

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