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Abstract



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Ascendancy through Perception: the Importance of Dedicated Investment in Academic Homeland Security Research and Inquiry

William Gardella

There are a multitude of definitions for the term homeland security. What precisely constitutes a nation secure? And what balance must be employed to ensure that such safety does not lie in the marginalization of the freedoms all citizens desire? The pursuit of academic insight and understanding will guide our nation's pathway to security. The questions that such analytical pursuits generate will give rise to answers within uncertainty. Uncertainty will remain a constant in the terrorist equation, an element of every question regarding terrorism. It is a surety that such questions need to be continuously addressed.

The concept of homeland security, or the ideal of a safe and secure nation, is not new. It is not a recently contrived or generated thought or purpose, catalyzed by the events of September 11, 2001. The tenets of a safe and secure nation existed even before our nation states coalesced into a united political and governmental structure. It is the continuance of an existing ideal, more sharply illuminated by the September 11th tragedy, which has narrowly focused our perception upon this purpose. The September 11th terrorist attack has immeasurably and forever altered America's perception of what constitutes a secure nation. There can be no singularly applied investment or strategy which will yield a safe and secure homeland. But the premise underlying the connective applications of this objective contains a thread of commonality. What reveals this similarity? What derivative underlies the vast investments made into answering the question: in what direction must our nation focus its security efforts?

The single most important aspect of homeland security has been, and will be, the dedicated investment in academic research and inquiry led by our nation's institutes of higher education and learning. Insight and direction are gained with knowledge and understanding. But within the clarity of insight lies a complexity which reveals both the dynamic nature of the threat and the vulnerable nature of our nation's infrastructure.

A DYNAMIC THREAT

Terrorism, by its very nature, employs a hidden and shrouded operational method. Uncertainty as to where, when, or how terrorists may strike deepens our fear of the terrorist agenda. Additionally it scatters the finite resources available to protect and secure our nation's infrastructure. Threats against the nation that were once orderly in nature now display the highest states of disorder, the resulting entropy leads to uncertainty as to how such threats can be surmounted. The allocation of limited resources cannot protect every structure, harden every target, secure every length of border, or encase the nation in a totally secure or impenetrable position. Therefore what discrete steps may be taken to achieve the daunting task of securing a nation which bases its existence on openness and freedom? The best and most informed manner in which that question can be answered is through academic research and inquiry.

Finite resources demand the selective and intensive scrutiny of critical insight and analysis. There is no aspect of human endeavor where academic inquiry has not led to a higher understanding of a problem and therefore a basis on which to proceed toward a solution in an educated and informed manner. Research into the operational methods and philosophical underpinnings of particular terrorist entities, foreign or domestic, will provide a pathway for securing our nation based upon clearly defined analytical interpretations. The knowledge gained through such academic pursuits will allow limited resources to be directed to significant areas of concern or risk. Areas that are deemed essential and assigned risk profiles – qualifying such areas as having a dynamic and cascading domino effect on the volatility of succeeding infrastructures – must be identified. A clear and precise accounting of our nation's infrastructure and the closely paralleled and linked systems upon which such infrastructure depends, must be undertaken to illuminate which areas deserve the highest consideration.

The terrorist operational methodology, employing an asymmetrical approach, particularly enforces the necessity to examine the executed terrorist operations – both discretely and within the totality of the circumstances inherent in such attacks. Every terrorist attack perpetuated by a particular and distinct organization has a certain linkage to other attacks – even if such linkage is formed only by a thin and slightly similar philosophical or operational agenda. Terrorism is a defined means to achieve a sociological or political objective in which fear and intimidation play a central role. The purpose and intent of such an incident sheds light on the effects the terrorist entity desires to achieve and provides insight into how a particular organization wishes to carry out its intended goal.

How can academic inquiry lead to a safe and secure Homeland? Through quantitative study and analysis the terrorist structure and operational functionality can be “reverse engineered” (borrowing a term associated with the applied science of engineering). The terrorist actions, through careful examination, inspection, and study, will yield the information through which the structural and operational functionality of the terrorist organization is exposed and will further reveal the mechanism for response.

It is difficult (if not impossible) to assign any degree of certainty to such events which, by their very nature, incorporate such a dynamic and non-linear basis of function. Once rigid and stabilized threats against the United States, that were clearly defined and readily discernable, now have fractured into an unstable and chaotic threat potential. The terrorist operational method purposefully employs such characteristics and

uncertainty has become a most effective weapon of choice.

STRUCTURES OF UNCERTAINTY

The structure of a complex organization often provides a very real insight into how the organization plans to accomplish its goal. The mechanics of structure portray the operational functionality of the organization. But the fractured cellular nature of terrorist organizations and their lack of a clearly defined structural apparatus produces uncertainty of how the terrorists plan to achieve their objective. This uncertainty is woven as a fiber into the methods employed by the terrorists and results in a lack of a clear perception as to where, when, or how the threat will be manifested. This disordered structure assists the terrorist entity by prohibiting a definitive course of preventative action. This is particularly applicable when limited resources prevent the securing of every point of vulnerability. At any given moment, the threat to our national security remains intact.

How is it possible for academic research and study to provide a solution to the complex nature of this type of threat? Despite the fact that the United States has the most technologically advanced military in the world, employing the most highly trained and well equipped soldiers in the world, our nation remains at risk. Some have argued that it is only a matter of time before the United States once again suffers an attack similar in size and pernicious intensity to the September 11th terrorist attack. The utilization of a chemical, biological, or nuclear component in such an attack remains a possibility and certainly remains a favorable and potentially desired method for the terrorist community.

Uncertainty is the hallmark of complexity. But the complexity of the terrorist ideal demands the rational insight gained from academic investigation. Solutions may be derived as to how to effectively secure the nation by assessing the vulnerability of the nation's infrastructure. Research must span the entire spectrum of terrorist operations. Funding of academic research must be a priority and must be strengthened. The course of action yielded from this approach will illuminate where finite resources can be applied to diminish the terrorist objective.

THE ACADEMIC INVESTMENT

What course of human conduct has not been touched by academic insight? Our nation's academic and research institutions have established a superior and unsurpassed perspective into almost every area of human endeavor. The capacity to formulate solutions to highly dynamic and complex problems requires a sustained academic expenditure. Practical and common sense solutions are derived from the results of such academic inquiry. Research requires a constant and prolonged financial infusion. The federal government of the United States, charged with the task of protecting every citizen, must directly invest significant financial resources into our nation's academic institutions.

The threat to our nation's security is no longer symmetrical in appearance, form, or function. But the lack of a uniform threat mandates the necessity of a clear academic understanding. The application of technologically advanced solutions must be tempered with knowledge. There can be no replacement for a clear and rational understanding of the complex blueprint of national security. Uncertainty will remain a definitive element of the process of understanding, but uncertainty can be diminished by perspective.

But uncertainty may lead to an undesired and counterproductive end result, based on what the terrorist desired to achieve. The consequence of uncertainty has affirmed the necessity of vigilance. The recognition that vulnerability lies at the hub of the terrorist wheel has led institutions to question and refine the definition of what constitutes a secure homeland. What was once a nation that never envisioned the totality of terror wrought from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on New York City, now realizes that the security of our nation forever lies within the nature of our preparation. Preparedness must employ a decisive recognition that through academic research and inquiry the path to a secure homeland will be resolved. Uncertainty will always remain a definitive element of this task. Through knowledge and understanding, the precise nature of what lies ahead may be determined. The smallest and most imperceptible detail forms a part of the fabric of solution. Academic institutions have no rival in their ability to address highly complex and analytical problems. That ability will lead to answers as to how our nation will achieve security.

There are a multitude of definitions for the term "homeland security." There are a multitude of questions as to how to precisely achieve this most highly prized and desired objective, of which academic research and inquiry is our nation's most secure investment.

William L. Gardella is employed as a deputy marshal for the State of Maine Judicial Marshal's Service, which is responsible for providing a safe and secure environment for members of the public accessing the judicial system of the State of Maine. A lifelong resident of Maine, Mr. Gardella attended Clark University in Worcester, MA.



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