

Testimony of
Mr. Richard Clark

September 3, 2003

Testimony of Richard A. Clarke

Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Technology, Terrorism, and Homeland Security

September 3, 2003

Terrorism, First Responders: How much is Enough?

Mr. Chairman, it's a pleasure to appear again before this sub-committee. Before I begin, I would like to complement you and Senator Feinstein on your persistent and diligent work over these last several years to improve America's preparedness to deal with terrorism. As I know well, you were dedicated to this issue long before it became fashionable. And your positions have always been those which have advanced our security.

It has also been my pleasure over the last several months to work closely with a former colleague of yours, Senator Warren Rudman, on the Independent Task Force on Emergency Responders. That Task Force, to which I was an Advisor, issues its report *Drastically Underfunded, Dangerously Unprepared* in June.

The report was the result of work with a series of organizations representing states, counties, cities, police, fire, public health, and emergency services departments. The bottom line of the report is stated in its title. We found that emergency responders across the country still suffer from significant equipment, training, and personnel shortfalls that would impede their ability to deal with major terrorist events, especially those involving chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear materials.

Following the release of the report, spokespersons for the Department of Homeland Security criticized it as over-stating the needs of the first responders. One noted, "You could spend the whole gross national product on first responders." Another said that we were seeking "gold plated telephones" for emergency responders. Actually, we were only seeking communications systems that work, unlike the New York Fire Department radios which tragically did not work well on September 11th.

The response from the Department highlights the problem. Discussion about Federal assistance to First Responders quickly degenerates into "my number is better than your number." That is because there is no formal process to determine the needs, prioritize them, and meet them in a multi-year program. This Committee, and others, have not been given the tools by the Administration to determine how much is enough.

Mr. Chairman, this is not a new problem. The Defense Department began tackling this issue forty years ago. What emerged from that struggle is a program planning and budgeting process which has been in place in one form or another for decades. We may all disagree about the size and content of the Defense budget, but we can do so in an empirical and analytical manner because that system is in place.

It might be useful to briefly recap that DOD process in broad strokes. It begins with annual Threat Assessment. The Threat Assessment informs a subsequent Requirements and Capabilities document, in which the military Services outline what they believe is necessary to counter the threat. The Secretary then issues Program Guidance, which provides overall guidance on available funding and priorities, showing how and to what extent each of the requirements will be met over the next five years.

This is a relatively transparent process that permits quantification. It also permits informed debate: has this or that threat been exaggerated? is some requirement over-stated? does the five year plan take too long to achieve a certain capability? is one capability more important than another?

The process also allows decision makers to determine quantitatively what the choices and the results would be if more (or less) funding were available. You can look at alternative multi-year plans and compare them, moving around components.

We need a similar process for First Responders. That process needs to answer some critical questions, which remain unanswered today: what capabilities do we need in metropolitan areas of various sizes, in police, in urban heavy search and rescue, in hospitals, etc? how much more capability will be get for a certain amount of money? how long is it going to take us to get to a desired level?

Mr. Chairman, I will be brief and to the point: this Committee and others should require the Administration and the new Department to create such a quantitative process. Legislation should be very specific about how that process should be shaped and what information should be shared with the Congress and the First Responder community. Only then will you be able to make informed decision about how much is enough.